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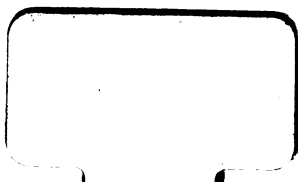
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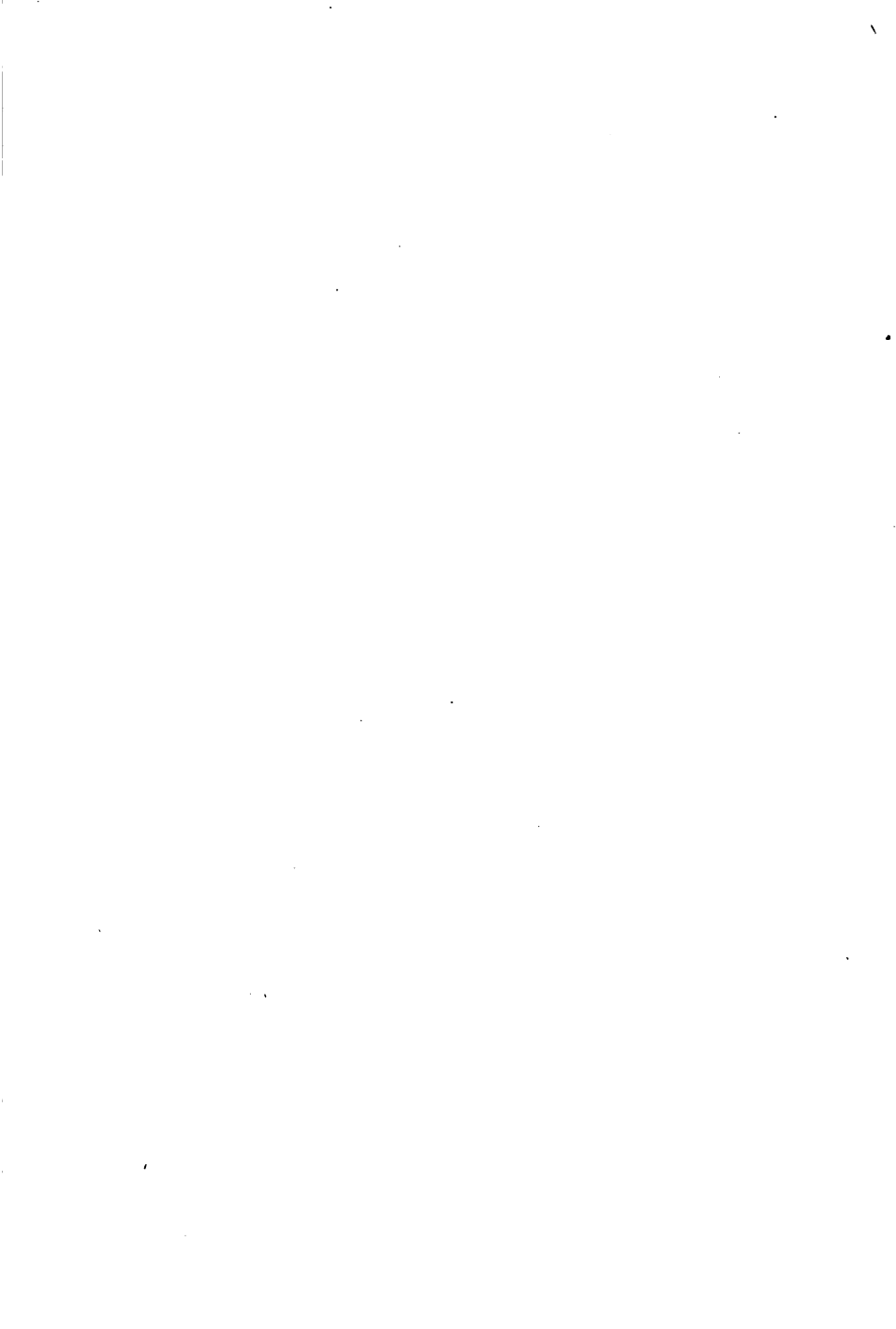


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THE GREAT MAZE
THE HEART OF YOUTH

BY HERMANN HAGEDORN

The Silver Blade. A one-act play in verse. Out of print.

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The Great Maze; The Heart of Youth. A poem and a play.



THE GREAT MAZE
AND
THE HEART OF YOUTH

A POEM AND A PLAY

By
Hermann Hagedorn

New York
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To
THE HILL SCHOOL

Not with swords, not with guns,
Mother of boys, you arm your sons.
East and west, south and north,
With a word in their ears, you send them forth;
With a word you gird their souls
For storms and starry goals,
And send them over the lands
With a torch, a torch in their hands.



THE GREAT MAZE

I

"TEN years of Troy have made my husband dumb,"
Said Clytæmnestra in her strong, slow voice,
So full of melody you scarcely heard
The sharp discordances of mockery
That rang athwart it, cold as steel on stone.
The banqueters looked up; the table-talk
Died in hushed whispers; one man choked and
coughed,
And one man laughed a drunken, quick, quenched
laugh;
But Agamemnon slowly raised his head,
And strangely dry and destitute of words,
With grave brow and unhappy, homeless eyes,
Gazed at his wife. The pale light on her lips
Perished as though a wind had blown it out.
But from the bright obscure of her profound,
Illegible, black eyes, a sudden spark

THE GREAT MAZE

Leaped toward the strong man with the coward's
heart,

Ægisthus, where he sat among his friends
And sipped diluted wine with restless mouth,
Afraid to trust too much his runaway tongue.
Over his face the phosphorescent flame
Of fear flared, licked, and passing upward, died,
Leaving his throat burning. His tongue was thick,
His lips with sickening, sudden fever dry.
He saw the eyes of Agamemnon turn
And follow Clytæmnestra's flying glance;
He saw them rest and gaze into his own,
With that slow fire that never flared nor roared,
But with hot, searing patience crumbled walls
And had burnt Troy at last with all its towers.
The eyes burned into his, he felt them burn.
Then when it seemed his desiccated soul
Must at a breath crumble and be swept forth,
Ashes and dust past Agamemnon's feet,
The King's glance turned again to her he loved,
A little puzzled by this war of eyes,
But never doubting that in her due time
She would resolve it all in quiet and peace.
Ægisthus flashed relief, and the Queen smiled

THE GREAT MAZE

Faintly; but in the delicate, curving lips
Was something less than woman's tenderness
For joy returned and ended widowhood.
Ægisthus, wise through watching of her face,
And learn'd, as never Agamemnon was,
In the dark lore and cipher of the Queen's
Shadows and shafts of light, laughed in his heart
To read the scorn that hung upon her lips
For this liege lord come home from war too late.
He smiled. But Agamemnon saw the smile,
And the smile died.

A harp's first, tremulous chord
Rose like cool waters through the sultry air,
Splashing clear melody; and where he crouched,
Mysterious as a mountain or the sea
Between the day and dark, a gaunt, old man
Softly began to chant the siege of Troy.
She listened, Clytæmnestra, smiling still.
But Agamemnon felt no rapture wake
His pulses as of old at the old song.
The tale of hard-fought battles brought no thrill,
No gust of pride the praise of his own name.
Troy seemed a legend of a far, dead day,
And he, its captor, dead and dust with Troy,

THE GREAT MAZE

Removed by dimlit ages from this man
Whom men called Agamemnon and who sat
At supper in his palace by the sea,
Watching perturbed his wife's perplexing face.
His eyes sought Clytæmnestra's but his gaze
Stood suppliant in vain at those dark doors.
Once he had entered and been welcomed there
To sunny chambers odorous with winds
Murmuring garden-magic and sea-lore
Through open casements. Dimly he recalled
Lost tricks of her lost girlhood, April moods
Of swanlike queenliness afloat on dreams,
Deep words that sank in sparkling silences,
And evanescent angers and sharp thrusts,
Cruel, but for the swift, requiting lips.
All that was dead as Troy.

He looked at her.

The swan had turned to stone, her very flesh
Seemed hard as alabaster, her black hair
Rigid as though a hand had hewn it out
Of Stygian marble, hewing each smooth curl
Too like the next to let it seem quite real.
She sat and smiled, but Agamemnon read
No weather-warning on the smooth, cold skies

THE GREAT MAZE

Of her immobile face. It seemed to him
That she was just a little bored, perhaps,
By the old bard's long story. He remembered
One banquet long ago when she had yawned,
Hearing how Pelops ate his own two babes
And was forever cursed with all his stem,
Pelops, who was her great-grandfather-in-law,
The family skeleton and horrible
Example. He remembered, too, the scene
After the banquet, how he scolded her,
And she, quite heedless, let her black hair fall
And combed it carefully and let him storm,
Knowing apparently what hosts she had
To take him captive when it suited her.
She was more beautiful, he used to think,
Than Helen herself, for Helen's radiance
Was of the dawn, made garish by the day,
But Clytæmnestra's was the loveliness
Of falling dusk : first glamour, then low winds,
The deepening heaven, the eager, virgin moon,
And one by one the great and lesser stars
Afloat on the wide silence of the night.
The perilous bloom of Helen's dawn was over.
Outside Troy's fallen walls he had seen her stand,

THE GREAT MAZE

Unchanged in the perfection of each line,
Still excellent, but with all magic fled.
Her husband's house could safely take her back.
For her no fleets would gather again like storms,
No seas be whipped ; her beauty's fangs were drawn.
He watched his wife who smiled and still could smile,
Conscious of mystery where no mystery
Had been in former times. The pitiless day
Had overtaken Helen, the dark night
Her sister Clytæmnestra. And the night
Was full of shadows and amazing shapes
And cold, white fogs. He watched her, suddenly
caught

By the new kindling of a passion he deemed
Spent these unnumbered years. He thought he saw
The Queen's smile warm into a woman's ere
It suddenly expired and she arose
And left the crowded hall.

He followed her.

The banqueters sprang up as they passed forth,
Stretched in relief when they were safely gone,
And slouching on the benches called anew
For food and wine, and bade the bard sing on.
Ægisthus only sat with worried eyes

THE GREAT MAZE

Watching the Queen's white cat paw at the cup
The Queen had left, half full. The beaker fell
Clattering to the floor, spilling the wine,
And the cat sniffed and lapped it up and licked
Her cold gray lips and looked about the room
With enigmatic eyes, and yawned and slept.

II

At Agamemnon's back the hangings closed.
But his wife turned with lips of venom. "Why,
Why do you follow me? My ways are mine.
Your ten gay, warring years have forfeited
What right my husband had to slink by night
After me down dark corridors. Go back!
There is your place, down there, with men! You
like

The company of men who fight and drink,
And women who are ninnies, but have looks.
Dear gods, you evidently do. You gave
Ten years to them, ten years, your best ten years —
And mine."

Her voice was suddenly strangely soft;
With perilous overtones of mockery
That seemed to lick like venomous, mute flames
About the difficult words. With quiet scorn,
So deeply purged by pain and heartsickness
Of all ephemeral smallness as to seem
Almost a holy mood, she turned from him.
He said: "I do not plead with you. Your heart

THE GREAT MAZE

Is strangely altered. Body and soul, indeed,
Seem beyond comprehending changed, caught up
In some gray vapor and borne far away
From corridors and chambers that you loved
And that were beautiful because of you."
Harshly her voice broke in. "Yes, I have changed.
Who would not change in ten years of slow
death?

You have not changed. No. You are quite the
same.

You live by deeds, by what your arms and legs
Can smite and fetch, by bodily delights
Of food and battle and lust, by bright seen things
And sharp things felt. No. Such men do not
change.

They grow in bulk; whatever hair they keep
Turns gray, the lines come on the brow, and lend
False evidence of wisdom where none is.
But in their inwardness they do not change.
They have no serpent there." Again the tone
Flame-licked and sibilant and venomous.

But Agamemnon looked into her face,
Half shrouded in the wan lamp's windy light.

THE GREAT MAZE

"Your ways are yours, you say. Then mine are
mine

To judge and to repair. More than strong arms
I gave to Troy's destruction. Let that pass.
I have returned to you after these years
Neither to judge nor be judged, but to live
A little while in peace before I die
With her I loved — ah, Clytæmnestra, look!
We are not children any more. Our lives
Have passed the peak, and tread the downward
slope.

We have no time to quarrel. We must learn
To hoard our days now, making golden piles
For memory to live on. You are deep.
I cannot fathom or pretend to pierce
With my man's inexperience of souls
That sea that is your spirit. Have I wronged you?"

"Wronged? Wronged?" She laughed, and Agamemnon's heart

Knew for the first time what it meant to fear.
His blood grew cold with fierce, unreasoned fear.
She did not laugh again, but when she spoke
She spoke as a snake might speak to a trapped toad.

THE GREAT MAZE

"Wronged? Wronged? You ask? You do not
even know?

The gods were kind to men, being men themselves,
And made them horn. But women they made
flesh

To bleed and agonize and pant with pain.

So it is ruled, it seems. Forgive. Your years

Are more than mine, and sometimes I forget

That though you are a wise man in your world,

You are a very child in mine. You are.

Great Agamemnon is a child and like

A silly child he threw his life away

To chase a light bird home to her old roost.

What babes! What babes you all were! Did you
wrong me?

I wonder sometimes are there any words

Simple enough to bear to childlike minds

Like yours, the intricate and subtle lore

Of the soul's inward life? I doubt it. Hands

Bleed vainly, knocking, when the man within

Is deaf or has a lady on his knee.

Why should I waste my breath?"

Her voice was harsh;

And Agamemnon, staring out to sea

THE GREAT MAZE

Through the wide window, watched the waves' white
line

Illumine the profundity of night

An instant with bright, flameless radiance

And perish in faint downfall of low waters

And fainter grist of pebbles, ere he spoke.

"Upbraid the gods who made me what I am.

I am a man, and men's ways are my ways.

I see no other. Yet if I have wronged you —

Ah, Clytæmnestra, let no rough camp fault

Impute to me an infidelity

That was not in my heart. My body loved,

Not I, Chryseis. And I put her by

Long since."

"When you were done with her! Of course,

You put her by. Why shouldn't you put her by

When all the sheen was blown from her fair flesh,

The mystery shattered, the adventure grown

Dull and habitual as marriage, hate

Uprisen where love was?" A sudden moan

Died hissing in her teeth.

"Forgive!" he cried.

She shrugged her shoulder, saffron-veiled. "Oh, yes,"

She said a little wearily. "Why not?"

THE GREAT MAZE

If it will make you happy. I suppose
When all the fun is over, it is pleasant
To have your wife forgive and clean the slate
For new delectable adventures. Yes.
We will regard Chryseis as wiped out.
What's the new name? Cassandra?"

He upraised

His powerful eyes, and even in dim light
She was aware of grandeur looking out.
He said: "Not as my mistress did I bring
Cassandra captive home, but as your slave.
A great king's wisest daughter for your slave.
What more could woman ask?"

She laughed again,

Softly, not scornfully, but with the tone
Of pitiful despairing that must laugh
To save itself from overmastering tears.
"What more?" she cried. "I wonder?"

For a while

Perturbed and animate silence held these two.
They heard the great sea pant and sigh without
Like a dream-harried sleeper; but within
They were aware of stormy, waking seas
Whose quick upreaching and indrawing surf

THE GREAT MAZE

Each in the other's troubled breathing heard
Across the stillness of the room. At last
Beside the window, with hands clasped behind,
And staring as at some vexed battlefield
Along the dim seashore, he spoke. "At Troy
I conquered, and I dreamed my days of war
Were over, and henceforth my troubled ways
Would be the fruitful and benignant ways
Of peace. I dreamed of home, this friendly house
Where you and I were happy as not many
Are happy in this difficult world. I dreamed
Of you and of the children, and this folk
That looks to me for guidance, and my farms
That need a master's eye; an end at last
Of quarrels and the argument of swords,
Peace for the remnant of my days. Perhaps,
I was what you denounce me for, a child.
So be it. I am older now. Each word
You coldly speak bears years upon its back
And on my heart unerringly flings down
Its crushing burden. If my dreams were vain,
So be it; if, after the war of swords
Must follow this more bitter war of souls,
So be it."

THE GREAT MAZE

Suddenly his calm, clear voice
Broke, and he turned with outstretched, pleading
hands

To Clytæmnestra, where with back pressed close
Against the wall, he heard her pantingly
Breathe, like a pump that sucks at a dry well.
"Ah, Clytæmnestra! There shall be no war.
See, I surrender, I fling wide my gates.
Enter! Do with me what you will. But, ah,
Let us not fight each other, we who loved
Freely and deeply, and again might love
And have glad days."

A cry sprang from her throat.
"Ah, listen, listen! How he talks, the man!
He can dream dreams! After ten lost, dead years,
He can make phrases still, he can paint pink!
Gods, gods! To stand in Hades with the damned
And chatter of sweet futures! Go away.
Go, Agamemnon! Oh, you child, you child!
You sentimental child!"

Her anger died
Hissing in waves of tears. Against the wall
She stood yet, facing him, with restless hands
That clutched at the smooth marble, and fierce eyes

THE GREAT MAZE

That glared with foggy, hot, pervasive glow
Through her ungoverned tears. He went to her,
And on her shoulders gently laid his hands,
Whispering, "Clytæmnestra," in low tones
That had such magic in their tenderness
She was almost persuaded while he spoke
That Troy was just a nightmare of an hour
And this was youth, and there was nothing to fear.
Her tears ceased. She looked up. Then tremblingly
She freed herself from his too dangerous touch,
And with the tiger's silent swiftness crossed
The shadowy room. Now it was she who stood
Beside the open window, at her ear
The fatherly sea uttering wise advice,
And on her cheek the impetuous, young wind,
Preaching no sermons, but with friendly hands
Cooling her burning face. Into the dark
She sent the hot glow of her desperate gaze.
The stars, it seemed, gave help. For when she turned
The glare was sunk to a slow smouldering,
Scarce visible in the vast black night of her eyes.
She spoke. Her deep voice quavered and died out.
Again she spoke, and in her throat again
Barriers fell, closing the way to words.

THE GREAT MAZE

She fought, beat down the barriers, and spoke.

"You say you dreamed. You say you dreamed of
rest

After your arduous toil, of ploughs and rakes
And other matters distance bathes in charm
And man's self-pity likes to ponder on
In mellow twilights. I suppose a hen,
Dreaming of pretty chicks four long, warm weeks,
Pities herself and sighs and finds life full
Of disappointments — when she hatches ducks.
I am not moved by pathos of that sort.
True, I am hard. Things that move other folk
To tears, move me to laughter. There you are.
If you would keep your pretty daydreams warm
You must not set them where my boreal blasts
Will blight their sweet, young lives. You dreamed,
you say.

You dreamed of me and of the children. Ah!
Which child did you dream most of? You had
three."

She heard him catch his breath and let it go
Slowly, with a reluctant, sighing sound.
Softly, with venom, she repeated, "Three."

THE GREAT MAZE

I know about them all. 'Since you have dreamed
So much about them, thought and planned so much,
Helped me so much to make them good and great,
I should be glad to give you my report.
Orestes is in Phocis —"

"Why?"

"Because

The air is better there."

"What does that mean?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "He was bundled off
A week ago without a word to me
To spend the summer — so Electra said —
Because the air was better there."

"The air?"

"The girl was sullen when she said it."

"Strange."

"Yes. Very. But it is her way. At times
A trying person. This last trick of hers
Is only one of many. I believe
She really cares for me; but she admits
She has queer fears her brother'll come to harm
Through me or through Ægisthus. Possibly
She may insinuate the thing to you.
Forewarned, forearmed."

THE GREAT MAZE

Her voice was clear and cool.
She might have been discussing kitchen-maids.
"I have reported on your son, I think.
Now to the girls. Remember, you had two.
Electra will be ten soon. You remember?
You went to Troy three months before she came.
You said you would be back in time. You said
Too many things like that. For I believed you.
You did not come."

"I could not come."

"I know."

You had to take a city. Ah, and I
Had only to bring forth a bit of life
With a red body and an ancient face.
It cried. Perhaps it did not like the world.
I would have starved it had it been a boy,
Or set him in the shade of some lean tree,
The way the peasant-women do, and let
The sun creep round to him and shrivel him.
But since it was a girl I pitied her
And gave her all I had, against the day
Of hunger sure to come." She spoke the words
In musical and mournful monotone
As though the passions that they whispered of

THE GREAT MAZE

Had long been dead, and she were but a mourner
Hired to bewail an unregretted corpse.
Then without warning through that sultry mood
Once more her bitterness flashed white and keen.
“How do you like my gay report? It seems
Two children are accounted for, one boy,
One girl. You had another child! One more!”
Her voice rose. “Did that hurt? Another child!
One boy and two — two girls. I can report
On only one girl, Agamemnon!”

“Stop!

We will not speak of that!” he cried.

She laughed

With fierce derision. “No, of course not, no!
We have a conscience.”

Fiercely he replied:

“The gods decreed her death, not I! The gods!
The gods demanded and I had to give.
My conscience is quite clear.”

A bat flew in

The open window and flew out again
With panic-stricken flutter. “Thus it was,”
He cried. “We lay at Aulis. Days and weeks
We lay, sails limp, becalmed. We prayed for wind.

THE GREAT MAZE

We sacrificed. Sheep, bulls. In vain. At last
We sent old Calchas to the oracle,
Calchas the seer. When he returned, his face
Was like a dead man's as he stumbled down
The lane of tents, and all his body shook
With terror and fear. I thought that he would die
Before his rattling throat would yield the words
The oracle had spoken. What he said —"
"Iphigeneia —"

From the garden came
The odor of white moonflowers opening,
And at the window a bright firefly danced,
Fled and returned, fled and returned and fled
Seaward away, gay parodist of souls.
"You know the rest. No wind would blow, he
said,
Until a child of Agamemnon's line
Were laid upon the altar-block, and slain."

"You sent me word Achilles wished to wed
Iphigeneia. She was fourteen then.
Young, young to wed, I thought. But in those days
I trusted you. I sent her. Gods, you lied!
You gave her to be slaughtered like a goat,

THE GREAT MAZE

Slaughtered that kings might sail on a fool's
journey."

She stared to sea. Her bosom rose and fell
Deeply, with sighings, like the sea's.

He spoke;

And in the firm voice was no lying strain
Of forced assurance: each clear word rang gold.
"The gods commanded. I obeyed. The gods
Are strange but mighty, not for men to judge.
They see where we are blind. Doubt if you will,
But I say this, I feel no guilt of blood.
My conscience is unvexed."

She stared at him

A long, slow minute. On his bearded face
The light of stars shone faintly, where he stood
Erect and kingly, looming large and grand
In that strange childlikeness her arrows sped
Against in vain. She saw each fiery shaft,
Swift, stern and straight, fly to its mortal mark,
And marvelled, seeing how it struck, and lo,
Sprang back and fell, made impotent by some
Unearthly armor, proof against her skill.
She gazed at him with cool, straight, thoughtful
gaze.

THE GREAT MAZE

"If only you were bad at heart," she said,
"I might find words to make your soul ashamed
Of the bleak, windy ruin you have made.
But, no. You are not bad. You are a child.
You play your games and break so many things
Unhidden, that at last when you destroy
A priceless vase, you cannot comprehend
Why there are tears nor wherein lies the wrong.
If you were bad, if you had devious ways,
If you were not a good man, with clear eyes,
Seeing one road and that road white and straight ;
If you had any shadows in your soul
For plots to brew in and black hates be born,
You might suspect that in this world all ways
Are not straight ways or clear ways, and that souls
Are like deep woods, dark and mysterious
Even at noonday. You are blind to men,
Blind to their powers, their feeblenesses, blind
To the ten thousand tricks life lightly plays
With souls and with events. You did not dream
That when you battered Troy and burnt its towers
There was another city, not of stone,
That shook beneath your onslaughts. It withstood
A long, long while, and then at last it fell.

THE GREAT MAZE

The wind is whistling in the ruins now,
Crying strange things you cannot understand."
Her voice was steady, cold and grave, and sad
As is the sea's when it is most serene.
It made the throat of Agamemnon beat
And choked the words that struggled like strong
men

Entombed, upward, for air and utterance,
And strove in vain. But Clytæmnestra turned
Moodily toward the sea her calm, dark eyes,
That were themselves immeasurable seas
Peopled with exquisite arrows of white light
And terrors tentacled; and spoke once more.
"Because you are not bad at heart, I hope
That you will never know what you have done
To me and to my life. Good night. Go now.
Go, Agamemnon!"

Through the calm, cold voice
Passion broke headlong. "Go! I tell you, go!
I hate you! Go! Oh, gods, gods, make him
go.

You have no right here! Go, you have no right.
Gods, gods, have pity! I have borne enough
These years, these years!"

THE GREAT MAZE

Against the window-ledge,
Half-fallen, she crouched. He strode across the
room ;

Like an enveloping, enormous cloud
He came. She moaned as he drew near, and raised
White, warding hands, tense, rigid, frozen hands,
That melted to limp softness as he pressed
The palms together and imprisoned them
In the large force and ardor of his own.
She moaned, "Go, Agamemnon !" with faint breath.
But tenderly, with warm, persuasive strength
He raised her, drew her toward him. Through her
limbs

In terror that was half delight, she felt
The gradual, glad yielding of tense cords.
He whispered, "Clytæmnestra !" and again,
"Ah, Clytæmnestra !" and most tenderly
Stroked the damp hair, murmuring, "Love, my
love !"

It seemed to her the sea had suddenly
Risen and overwhelmed them in the surge
Of tumbling, gliding and upheaving waves.
Above the world, between the earth and stars,
In green waves rolled and on slow combers borne,

THE GREAT MAZE

She seemed to hang. He spoke. She heard him
speak ;

Yet only as one hears a greater wave
An instant roar above the monotone
Of the incessant surf. "Ah, love, look up!
My love, my wife, my old, dear love made new!"
Slowly, long after they were said, the words
Seemed to emerge like straight ghosts, one by one,
Out of the dark, and knock upon her brain,
And through some dusky door ajar, slip in ;
And she looked up and found his eyes, and gazed
Long, feeling wrongs burn up like straw, and years
Like dead grass on a windy hill. She felt,
One after one, the old, bright fires start up,
Until her body seemed to her one coal
Of pure heat and unspotted glow, a star
For his encircling ether, a deep sea
For his caressing wind, a drowsy cloud,
An iridescent, bounding bubble, blown
Skyward by him.

She fainted in his arms.

She felt cold water trickling down her neck,
And with reluctance painfully upraised

THE GREAT MAZE

The iron curtains between sleep and life
And opened her dark eyes. She saw herself
Stretched on her couch and at her side, bent low,
Great Agamemnon, chafing her cold hands.
She drew her hands away and murmured, "Go!"
Most piteously always that one word,
"Go!" like the moan of a raw, desolate wind
Crying amid bleak ledges and dead trees
And empty, staring houses. Then at last
She rose up dizzily, and he too rose
With burning, questioning eyes. But on his arm
She laid her flame-like hand. "It is too late,"
She said. "Too late. Too late. Too late. Too
late."
Her voice rose, shivered, shook, surprised by sobs,
Broke, and died out in long-drawn, ebbing moans.

III

Troubled, bewildered, lonely, sick at heart,
With bowed head, Agamemnon, king of men,
Strode down the corridor. The house was mute
Save for his footsteps. In the banquet-hall
Silence upon the memory of song
Made its own banquet; other revellers
Were none. He strode across the hall where yet
The fumes of wine hung, and the Queen's white cat
In velvet slippers paced the marble floor.
She hissed at Agamemnon as he passed.

He crossed the porch. Its ancient pillars loomed
Gigantic as the shapes of fever-dreams
Before, beside, behind. It seemed to him
He swept them from his path and they returned,
And angrily he swept them from his path,
Gaining the garden like some hard-fought shore.

The garden greeted him with music. There
Leaves rustled very softly; and so full
Of cadenced melody the insects filled

THE GREAT MAZE

The warm, sweet air, that all the song they made
Seemed nothing else than singing silence, now
By some sharp ranter of the cricket-clan,
Now by some wild and sooty wing in flight,
Broken an instant. Solemnly the sea
With her eternal bass accompanied
Their tender, temporal trebles, and a wind
At intervals came lightly from the east
And shuffled all the notes to a new tune
Of cool, faint magic.

Agamemnon heard ;

And on the summit of the gleaming stair
Stood still, caught by the splendor of the night,
The fragrance, and the beauty of white stars
Set in the dark, translucent bowl of heaven,
The beauty of still tree-tops, and beyond,
Of a forever restless sea. A glow
Suffused him and receded ; standing there
Before that waste of pillars rising up,
He seemed himself a frozen shaft of stone,
A pillar, holding up uncertainly
A structure undermined. He raised his head
Swiftly, alert, attentive ; on the wind
He thought he caught a broken snatch of talk,

THE GREAT MAZE

Like a twig flying, followed by loose leaves.
The gust fled and was gone. With puzzled brow,
Attentive ears and thoughtful, lagging pace,
Heavily he descended the wide steps.

Aimlessly and yet not without all aim
He strode along the garden-paths that wound
In calculated, labyrinthine coils
Now shell-like in upon themselves, now out
In widening circles through that wide, still place
Under the oleanders and the olives,
The fig tree and the rose. A dozen times
He stopped, perplexed and distantly amused
At the incongruous absurdity
Of disentangling mazes of this sort
While deeper labyrinths within the brain
Asked all he had of wisdom. With bowed head,
Aimlessly, and yet not without all aim,
He strode; for at long intervals the wind
Brought disconnected particles of talk
In two strange voices and one voice he knew.
At last he fixed the thicket whence they came,
Stood still and raised his head; then straight across
The wet lawn strode and found the labyrinth's heart

THE GREAT MAZE

With three men in it merged in one gray blur,
Two strangers and Ægisthus.

Motionless

A long half minute, islanded in seas
Of honeysuckle fragrance on the wind
Rising and falling like eternal tides,
The four men stood. Then in a quiet voice,
Remote from anger and as cold as swords
Drawn for a battle, Agamemnon spoke,
"Dismiss your friends, Ægisthus."

To the south,
Heat-lightning, many-fingered, flared and fell,
Revealing luridly what three men there
Sought in the dark to hide; the fourth saw all,
And the three cringed with heads each close to each,
Furtively and by inches drawing back.
But Agamemnon said, "Dismiss your friends.
You stay." Ægisthus whispered, "Go." The two
Retreated, and were gone. Through the still night
The sound of bushes trampled told their haste.

Then, breathing deeply, Agamemnon spoke.
"You are a crafty man, Ægisthus. Far
More crafty in expedients than men

THE GREAT MAZE

Who think less and do more. But there are
times

When minds like yours, too used to ways around,
Fail to discern the entrance to ways through.
You should have murdered me this afternoon."

He heard Ægisthus gasp and try to speak —

"Before I set a foot inside my house,
Before I saw you or saw — anyone,
You had your moment. In your place, I think
I should have taken it, Ægisthus. Ah,
You think so too, I'm sure. One sees such things
With painful clearness when it is too late."

Then suddenly Ægisthus raised his head
As at a challenge, sniffed, and leisurely
Folding his arms, brought his satiric eyes
At last to meet the eyes that questioned them,
And to reply through half-shut, heavy lids
As through a grating that conceals the soul.
A lazy smile, remotely insolent,
Curled the full lips. It was a stalwart face,
Noble of feature, flushed and crowned with curls;
And Agamemnon, in that dusky grove

THE GREAT MAZE

Lit only by the stars and at the rim
Of sea and heaven the promise of the moon,
Wondered why memory should still persist
In bearing evidence against that face.
Ægisthus spoke. His voice was soft and clear
And every syllable a bit of song,
Carefully made. "You are unjust, absurd.
You see three men together in the dark,
And with the easy vanity of kings
Assume at once they plot to murder you.
You are grotesque. This is no army camp.
'Act first and reason after' will not do."
And then as though he deemed it provident
To palliate his insolence with mirth,
He smiled; and as he smiled, it seemed his face
Glowed with an overflowing of warm light,
Save for two discs of jet, white-ringed, that gleamed
Like cups of molten tar. Those were his eyes.

Unruffled, Agamemnon watched the smile
Fade out. "The secret of what might have been
If in my mind the action and the thought
Had moved in other order than they moved,
Should prove in years to come, if such shall be,

THE GREAT MAZE

A green field for your ruminating mind
To browse and flourish in. Tell me the plot."

Ægisthus smiled a slant, satiric smile.

"Come, uncle. You are getting old. And bald.
You gained much fame in Troy, and lost some hair.
They say Aunt Helen is not what she was.
The climate must be bad."

"Tell me the plot."

"The little conference concerned myself,
Myself alone. Will you believe me?"

"No."

"You will not make me love you very much."

"Where did you plan to murder me? My bed?
My bath? Where? When?"

Ægisthus answered him

With a low laugh that had no mirth in it.
But Agamemnon brought his great hands down
Like talons on his shoulders, holding him
Rigidly as a buttress holds a wall,
While with his eyes he scanned the crafty face
For things more easy to translate than words.
He cried, "You are not one to murder men
Of your own will. Someone has sent you!"

THE GREAT MAZE

"No!"

A quick cry broke from Agamemnon's lips.

"Good! That was truth. Your eye said that was truth.

Go on. Who were those men?"

Ægisthus raised

His restless eyes and made them meet unmoved

The eyes of Agamemnon. Then he spoke.

"Phoenician merchants, friends of mine from Sidon.

They have a ship. They carry goods for me,

Silk, amber, ivory and precious gems

From Persian markets. They arrived to-night.

There lies the laden ship with sails yet raised.

They came to tell me how in Babylon

They purchased —"

Agamemnon loosed his hands

And with a thrust of undisguised disdain

Set the man free. "I have no faith in you.

I think that you are lying."

"As you will.

The fact remains whatever plot there is

Leads not to you, but to an argosy

At anchor in the bay. As for yourself —

Why, you're my uncle, and one loves one's uncle."

THE GREAT MAZE

He laughed good-humoredly, but there were flaws
In the soft, calculated laughter, flaws
Of breathing hampered by a thumping heart
And faithless knees that would not cease their
quaking.

And Agamemnon with his steady eyes
Watched him and let the laughter lamely die,
Then like a bolt of lightning spoke. "Enough.
Let us leave lies a moment and be clear
Concerning what has been and what shall be
Between us two, Ægisthus. By all means
Let us be clear. After ten years of war
I come back home, and find a man I know,
And neither love nor honor, in my house,
Familiar with my wife, exchanging looks
Across a crowded banquet-hall with her,
Smiling when she smiles, troubled at her frown;
Triumphant, insolent; and yet afraid
To meet the question in a husband's eyes —
Let us be clear. I find my wife quite changed.
Women may change in ten years. I grant that.
Women may change although there be no guilt,
Grow old, grow ugly, weary, sick. In her
There is a deeper change, not in the flesh,

THE GREAT MAZE

Not in the spirit only. She is caged,
Ægisthus. There are walls about her, bars !”

Swiftly the parry of Ægisthus came :
“True, Agamemnon. She is deeply changed.
Perhaps she has been dying these ten years.
You and not I may be the murderer here —
Who knows? She loved you, Agamemnon. Ah !
Stay where you are ! If you must play the judge,
You shall be just and hear my argument.”
His voice was bold, but Agamemnon laughed
A quick, cold laugh, knowing how carefully
That voice was trained to seem what it was not.
A savage wish to choke it for all time
Made his head burn, his fingers twitch. He laughed
Scornfully as before, instead ; and watched
Two herons winging straightly out to sea
With the stars over them, the deep beneath,
Aching with sudden envy. Sharply then
He turned and spoke. “Say what you have to
say.”

Ægisthus looked at him with his own scorn.
“There are some matters warriors do not see
Which we, who cravenly ward hearth and farm,

THE GREAT MAZE

Learn with some pain. You think not? Ah, I
know

What noble Agamemnon thinks of me!

Sneer, sneer! I have my own contempts!"

"Take care,"

Said Agamemnon in a quiet voice.

"These are large issues that we battle over,

Ægisthus. Let it not be said of us

That, standing at the very knees of doom,

We were so far forgetful of the presence

As to make petty warfare with shrill words

And empty fulminations."

Mockingly

Ægisthus laughed. "Let us be dignified

By all means, if it seems more proper. Listen.

When you went off to Troy ten years ago,

You said that you would stay a month, two, three,

No more than three."

"I was mistaken."

"True.

A month the Queen was happy, I am told.

Then she began to hope for your return,

And watch for sails and messengers by sea,

And messengers by land and beacon-fires —"

THE GREAT MAZE

"I had no messengers to spare."

"Indeed?"

She did not know it. So she always hoped,
With woman's scorn of probabilities
And woman's patience and unaltering love."

"Man, leave the love alone!"

"Be calm. I know

Whereof I speak."

"Go on."

"Your child was born
The third month. You had promised to be home.
You were not home."

"I sent a man —"

"Ah, yes.

You sent two messengers that month. The first
Demanded tidings, but the other called
Iphigeneia with a lying lure —"

"These things are Clytæmnestra's and my own
To disentangle. I have given you ear
To hear your story of this death-in-life
Whereof you call me guilty. You accuse,
Accuse, and tell me nothing that makes clear
This dungeoning of one who in old days

THE GREAT MAZE

Was free as few are free. What I suspect
You know. A thousand fingers point at you.
But they are phantom fingers, phantom fears.
I cannot make them real or trust in them.
There is another trust that fills my being
And will not let fear in. Tell what you know."

Ægisthus studied him, amused, yet awed.
There was some god's bright shield before that
heart,

Some god's hand over it. Or could it be
Great Agamemnon was thick-skinned? He laughed,
Not audibly, but in the galleries
Where undeceptive with himself he strode,
He laughed at Agamemnon's elephant-hide.
Submissively, he spoke: "So much I know:
You fought at Troy and took no count of
time.

Days came and went, lit by the flash of swords —
And other flashes of less wounding arms —
Months, years, dropped unregarded. No one
watched
Their coming and their going with strained eyes.
But here, across the waters, in your house,

THE GREAT MAZE

Was one who lived for nothing but to watch
The minutes rise in hope and pass in pain.
To you a day was nothing, but to her
It was a graveyard where at dead of night
Dogs congregate and fight and howl." His voice
Was deeply eloquent. A swift flame ran
Along its perfect music, warming it;
And Agamemnon wondered distantly
Why something in him turned toward this keen
 knave

In sudden sympathy. "Go on," he said.
Ægisthus spoke again, and now the words
Were soft and swift like birds upon the wind.
"The hours were years, the days were long lives
 spent

In learning and re-learning lessons — how
To hope and be resigned and still to hope,
To love and long and yet to keep this flesh
Unfaded for the half-despaired return
To-night, to-morrow or a thousand nights
Beyond to-morrow. What those long nights were
One heart and one heart only knows."

"True, true,"

Said Agamemnon.

THE GREAT MAZE

“Not one month ; ten years
Day came in hope and died in misery.
Ten years of days ascending and descending !
Count them, great Agamemnon. Count the hours,
The minutes, like an endless, thin, white line,
Stretching across the desert, never still
In sunlight or in moonlight, from some far
And cruel quarry to some pyramid
A frightened pharaoh builds to bury his fear.
The minutes carry stones upon their backs,
Great Agamemnon ! Ah, they carry stones
For man to build his houses with, his tombs,
His temples — and his cages.” On the air
The eloquent voice a moment seemed to hang,
Echoing ; then the music of the night
A long time, undisputed, held that dark
And fragrant thicket, where two men stood
mute,
Each wondering what thoughts were galloping
Along the highways of the other’s mind.
The sea sent her slow waves against the land
Uncounted times ; far out a gull went by,
Calling, and close at hand a cricket cut
The soft, pervasive hum with rasping chirp.

THE GREAT MAZE

But Agamemnon did not hear these things.
There was an inner music that drowned all
External sound, as one by one harsh chords
Amazingly resolved themselves in clear
And unperplexing harmony. He breathed
Deeply. His body seemed to throw off chains.
Fear vanished, hate, distrust, suspicion, all
That like a fever-dream had lain on him
Uprose, dissolved. Here was the tangle, cleared.
How blind, how like the mass of common hearts
To flare with low suspicions, thrust faith out
And open doors and windows wide, for fear
To enter with his demons. Ah, how base,
How faithless so to harbor love's worst foe
And give him food and drink and listening ears!
Where love is, there can be no jealousy.
Lust may be jealous, but not love; for lust
Is all a seizing and a clasping close
Of slippery gems; but love is open hands
And quiet eyes and self-forgetful dreams.
Her very love for him had changed his wife,
Turned her to stone, imprisoned her in deeps
Where bitterness was gaoler and the hours
His tireless ministers of torture. Thus

THE GREAT MAZE

The years would change a woman. Had he known
A little better how a woman's heart
Is intricately fashioned to feel pain,
And to create out of the lonely dark
Shapes more malignant and more fierce to fright
Than any phantom that the Styx rejects,
For him, Troy might have kept its lovely prize
And fallen, if it must, of its own shame.
If he had known! Indeed, he had not known.
And Troy was level as the sea, but here
Was wilder devastation wrought on her
He would have died defending had he known.
He watched the east grow silvery with the pale,
Bright harbingers that ran before the moon;
And as he watched, it seemed to him the night
Was not more filled with wonder and deep calm
Than his own being, cleared at last of doubts
And by the winds of understanding cleansed.
He held the secret of her anger now;
The black enigma of that lost, "Too late!"
That ran like acid burning over him,
Was solved. Of course, to one remembering
Those years of slow corrosion from within,
It must indeed seem bitter raillery

THE GREAT MAZE

To speak of hope, or deem that kisses could
Rekindle the cold embers on the hearth.
Of course, of course, now it was all quite clear,
And flying looks meant nothing. How absurd
Ever to think they could mean anything !
Ægisthus was not bad ; somewhat a fool,
And irritating with his insolence
And his infernally melodious voice ;
But never base. His father had been base
And led him into bypaths in his youth,
Treason, rebellion ; but all that was past,
Dead, buried and forgotten. Since those days
The man had grown, perhaps. He had much
charm.
And there was eloquence in his defence
Of Clytæmnestra's empty, tragic years.
Yes, more than eloquence — warmth, tenderness,
And shining wells he had not thought were there.
He turned to tell him so.

The man was gone.

IV

A nightingale broke into song and trilled
Her careless bar of world-forgetting love.
But Agamemnon did not hear that music.
He staggered like a man struck in the dark
By thieves, crying, "Ægisthus? Are you there?
What game is this? Ægisthus!" Far away
He heard an owl hoot. On his flesh, like snails,
He seemed to feel the tangible Fear creep.

Out of that thicket like a bull he broke,
Roaring and crazed with pain. He snapped the
boughs

That struck him in the face; with savage hands
He thrust them back and broke them, recklessly
Stalking through beds and bushes, treading down
A thousand flowers, and crushing underfoot
A score of dreams his crafty gardener
Had made to live and blossom and give odor.
His being was a hell of hooting tongues.
This was the end of things, this was the end.
He need not fear or question any more;

THE GREAT MAZE

He need not hope or struggle ; for all time
Transcendent certainty had made an end
Of every torturing perplexity.
"Ah, Clytæmnestra !" Through his stormy veins
The name ran like a runner with a brand,
Calling to war. He stood still. With his arms
He shut the sea out from his eyes, he shut
The garden, the wide world out ; with sick heart
Crying to memory to recreate
The unmysterious face of other days.
Out of the darkness of his soul it came,
With eyes wide open.

Gradually now
The storm subsided in him, in its wake
Leaving obtrusive wreckage, and below,
Drags and outgoing currents. Up and down
The broad, white garden-path that faintly gleamed
In the amazing light of stars, he strode,
The huge form feeling pitifully small,
The wise man baffled, and the lover torn
By jackals for a loathsome feast. The moon
Slowly uprose southeastward from the sea,
A floating blur of silver light. He faced
Its womanly beauty half defiantly,

THE GREAT MAZE,

Hands clasped behind and heavy shoulders sunk,
A black, enormous bulk against the pale
Shimmer and watery gleam.

Through the far dark
He saw a white form run, a slender form
Run down a distant garden-path, a ghost
For pallor, a white doe for speed, a sprite
For springy, shy and wind-blown loveliness.
Down broad, white steps and down the broad,
white path
Whereon he stood, now hesitant, now swift,
And now at last with slow steps on tiptoe
And half-choked noises between laughter and gasps,
Tremblingly it drew near.

“Daddy!”

“My girl!”

She sprang into his arms and clung to him
With happy words and wriggle of light limbs,
And dovelike, cooing sounds. He drew her close,
Welcoming her with kisses and the strength
Of his great arms about her, and faint words
Half-said, half-sobbed. She was like dawn to him.
With his own garment's folds he covered her,
And held her feet and warmed them, and her hands

THE GREAT MAZE

And laid them on his lips. Her loose, black hair
Blew lightly like a scarf across his face
And made him dizzy with the scent of it,
For it was like her mother's. Tenderly
He took the strands and laid them on her head.
She seemed a thing unearthly, and almost
He asked her, not all playfully, what god
Had sent her from Olympus to this dark
And vexéd house to guide bewildered souls
Out of the mazes they themselves had drawn.
He did not ask it lest he puzzle her
And mar the perfect calm of those large eyes.
"Young ladies should be tight abed," quoth he,
"Three hours or more. Since when do we ex-
plore
The garden in our nightgown?" She looked up.
The moon shone on her face. A serious face,
Thought Agamemnon, a sad, agéd face.
And she was not quite ten years old. She spoke.
"I saw you from my window — and I thought —
You were somebody else." There was a hint
Of fear in her clear voice. "Who else?" he asked.
"Whom else would my young ladyship pursue
Down moonlit garden-paths, attired like this?"

THE GREAT MAZE

She turned away. "Ægisthus," she replied,
In low, sharp tones.

He gasped, and on a bench,
Backed by high roses, fronted by the sea,
Sat down and drew his burden close. "Ægisthus,"
He whispered. "Why Ægisthus? At this hour?"
He felt her bosom rise and fall again
And rise and fall before at last she spoke.
"I am afraid of him."

"Afraid? Quick! Why?"

His voice was violent.

"I was afraid
That he might hurt you."

"Why? Quick! Tell me why
You were afraid. Why should you be afraid?
Quick! Tell me, quick, why should you be afraid?"

He saw her eyes fill and grow dark with tears.
"What have I said?" she asked bewildered. "Ah,
What have you said?" he cried. "What have you
said?"

He gasped. "Nothing." He stroked her heavy
hair.

"Forgive me. I am harsh and rough. My life

THE GREAT MAZE

Has been a soldier's life. Such flowers as you
Should not be trusted to such hands as mine."

"Why not?"

"For many reasons. First, because
Rough hands might break a petal off; and last,
Because the hands that touched what these have
touched

Do not deserve to come so near to childhood."

"I'll tell you why I was afraid," she said.

Gently he laid his hand upon her mouth.

"Not now," he whispered. "Some day, but not
now.

We must be wise. We must be very wise.

Before we say a word we must be sure

We know the demons that reside in it,

And can pronounce the magic formula

That will bewitch them back into their caves

When we are done with them."

"How sad you sound!"

"Not sad, my heart. But old. Old as those stars.

And they are older than all living things,

All houses and all temples and all gods,

Older than Zeus's father. They rode there

THE GREAT MAZE

Before Deucalion was, or Uranos
Or Chronos, father of the years. Some day
I shall be just a little heap of dust,
And then a few years more, you will be dust,
And all your children and your children's babes,
All of them will be dust; but those white ships
Will still be sailing nightly, and in worlds
That have forgotten Agamemnon — yes,
And even sweet Electra — men will still
Watch their slow journey through that waveless
deep,

And holding close their little girls be glad
That in this grim, sad world there still are stars."
His voice died slowly, lingering on the words
As though the thought of those untroubled orbs
Brought such warm comfort, such inflowing strength,
He could not bear to let the silence have it
And with its many fingers throttle it
Before his eyes.

"Why are you shivering?"

A child voice asked. "Dear Daddy, are you cold?
It really isn't cold to-night. It's warm.
Perhaps somebody walked across the place
Your grave is going to be. That might be it.

THE GREAT MAZE

Once mother shivered, and I told her that,
And she said, 'Yes, I'm very sure of it' —
Like that. I asked her, 'Where d'you think it is?'
She didn't answer for a long, long time.
And then at last she said, 'My grave is Troy,
And I am buried there.' Wasn't that queer?
I wonder what she meant?"

Her voice died out
In dreamy contemplation of the heavens,
Now frosted over by the far-blown breath
Of storm, pursuing the veiled moon. Her eyes
Were large and dark as Clytæmnestra's own —
"When people die, they're buried or they're burned,"
The child went on. "They don't walk any more,
Except as ghosts. And they don't do that much.
But mother's often said that she was dead,
Not as a joke at all, but solemnly
As though she really wanted me to know
And was afraid I might not understand.
I asked Ægisthus once, but he just laughed
And told me a long story how a king,
Admetus was his name, let his wife die,
And Heracles, just happening along,
Heard all about it and went down to where

THE GREAT MAZE

Dead people go, and fetched her back again.
And he was Heracles, he said."

She screamed
With sudden pain. "Daddy! You hurt my foot.
You dug your nails deep in!"

He made no sound.
It seemed to him that moment, holding her,
That all nobility, all life had left
Of worth and honor found its end in this:
To keep this child unscarred by strife not hers,
And uninvaded by his woe her heart.
He bent low over her and kissed her hair
Whispering tender, broken words.

The tears
Rushed from her eyes as though a dam had broken.
"Don't, don't!" he gasped. She tried to check
them then,
And choked, coughing and writhing in his arms,
Struggling for breath and pitifully groaning.
He drew her close and closer, uttering
Strange, inarticulate and throaty sounds,
Half human moan and half the blood-choked roar
Of a death-smitten lion. Lacking words,
He touched her hair, her brow, her hands, her feet.

THE GREAT MAZE

Her sobbing ceased at last. She wiped her tears
On Agamemnon's crimson cloak-of-kings.

"I don't know why I cry this way," she said.

"Do you?"

Over her startled face, his eyes
Burned with the savagery of blank despair.
He spoke, but not to her. His glance went out
Over the sea into the deeps of night.

To the dark night he spoke or to his soul,
Lost in the black upbillowings of far storms
On the moon-washed horizon; not to her.

"I know, I know! We are betrayed, we two!

I did not easily believe. Ah, sweet,

I did not lightly trust, I did not give

Jealousy easy entrance to my heart.

I saw, I heard, and doubted sight and hearing.

I saw, I heard again, and still I said,

This is some blemish in yourself, some blur

On your own vision, in your own hid depths

Some ugly sediment of falsity,

Roiled up by life estranged from nobleness

And women high and true. I could not doubt.

There were too many memories. You see,

We married very young, and we were happy.

THE GREAT MAZE

Some day, perhaps, when you are grown, some day,
When love, like dawn uprising from the sea,
Suffuses all you call the world with light,
And makes your face a glory that young men
Will capture kingdoms for, and aged men
Remember like the guiding words of gods,
That day, if I am living, you shall hear
What stuff those memories were builded of,
And why it took the heavy rams of doubt
So long to batter them, and what it meant
To see the structure crumble."

She looked up.

Their eyes met, and once more hers filled with tears.
"What is it mother did?" she asked.

He gasped,

And once again he felt the furies run
Along his veins and make his body burn
And his head tingle and go suddenly light
And float in murky air through an unreal world
Full of mad, humming things. He pressed her close.
"Now go to bed. You mustn't wake to-night.
You must sleep sound all night. Sleep, sleep and
dream.

All night. You hear? All night."

THE GREAT MAZE

"Why, Daddy?"

"Why?"

His voice was hushed and tremulous and mad.

"Because there is a harpist at the gate
Who will come in soon and walk down the halls,
Playing the sad song of the end of things —
The end of youth, the end of beauty, the end
Of joy and love and faith. Ah, sweet, sleep sound,
Lest, through the curtain of faint sleep, you hear
His blighting music, and before your time,
Before love comes, before joy comes, or faith,
Know them for what they are."

He kissed her brow,
Her cheeks, her eyes, her hair. She clung to him.
About his neck she threw her bare, white arms,
Clasped her white hands, and would not be dis-
lodged,
Though he upbraided her with fierce, wild words,
Battling for freedom from her tenderness.
She gasped for breath. "You'll have to cut my
hands.

I won't let go."

"I say you shall!"

"I won't!"

THE GREAT MAZE

He struggled, tearing at her wrists. "You shall!"
"You hurt me so," she moaned, "you hurt me so."
"Let go!"

"No, no! I am afraid for Mother."

His hands fell and he sobbed. His great frame shook
As houses shake in storms, and heavily
He sank down on the bench and stared across
The pitiless, hard blackness of the sea,
Sobbing gigantically, with no tears
To soothe the raw, red anguish.

Overhead

Behind uprising vapors, the bright stars
Were dim now, and the warm night was the moon's,
Where like a vague and ghostly brig it sailed
Through troubled seas and made the cloudbank glow.
Electra laid her cheek against his cheek,
Uttering sounds that had their deep intent
Though language knew them not. He caught their
sense,

And gradually as a storm subsides
His sobs went out in silence. Gently then
He rubbed the hurt hands, murmuring, "Protector!
Protector of us both! Ah, watchful heart,

THE GREAT MAZE

Protecting us who called you to this rough
And troubled world, and made no bower for you
To bide in even a little span of years,
Apart from the fierce noise and passion of life.
Am I betrayed? Have we betrayed each other,
Your mother and I? You are betrayed, not we.
For we forgot you, fighting for vain things,
And lavishing such pity on ourselves,
We had none left for you who needed pity
And were too young to know it."

Tenderly

He pressed the hand that lay upon his shoulder,
Light as a poplar leaf. "You are betrayed,
Not she nor I, save as one fault in both
Betrayed us both. You with your loving heart,
Your wise mind and your body like a stem
A lily nods on, you, my flower, my bird,
You are betrayed. All that asked light in you,
All that asked love in you and wanted mirth
And quiet, growing days, all is betrayed."

She raised her large, dark eyes and gazed at him
In puzzled wonder. "Sleep, my heart," he said.
"You shall have love at last, you shall have love."

THE GREAT MAZE

She sighed and smiled and closed her eyes, and
sighed

As though she were releasing, one by one,
Troubles and pains and plaguing memories,
And was not sad to have the sultry air
Receive them and absorb them and at last
Whisk them on some quick gust out of her world.
She squeezed the fingers resting on her hand,
And then withdrew her hand and let it hang
Like a slim iris, drooping at her side,
Ever so faintly whitened by the moon.
He stroked her hair with slow and steady strokes,
Watching the face upon his arm with eyes
That had a hungry, lost forsaken look,
More like a lion's than a man's, so much
Of blank, uncomprehending misery
Shone greenly in them.

And at last she slept.

But still he stared at the pale, peaceful face,
Dumb, save at last for one low, long-drawn moan
Like a dog's howl when ghosts are in the air.
And then he rose and very tenderly
Bore her across the garden, up the steps,
Across the pillared porch into the house.

V

Beside the window, shaken as a ship
After a gale that has dismasted her,
Still sobbing softly, Clytæmnestra stood.
There was no passion in her sobbing now,
No hate or scorn or anger, only grief,
Rising and falling in melodious moans
So regular and so mechanical
They might have been the meaningless, last sounds
The body utters when the heart-beats end
And all the great machinery stands still.
She watched the slow waves. They were like the
hours
The dead know, and she knew, each like to
each
Out of the dark deep rising, but to sink
In the brown sand and leave no trace behind.
She wondered whether Agamemnon too
Were standing by some window, sick at heart,
Watching the waters come and go, and hearing
Their tragic, foreign music, unappeased,
Remembering other days. It seemed to her

THE GREAT MAZE

She heard the world's heart beat beneath her
window ;

And wondered whether he too heard it. Ah,
What did it say to *him*? What was there left
For any wind or any sea to say
To her or him, that they two, who had seen
Love rise in glory and go down in shame,
Did not already know?

She caught her breath.

What did he know, how much had he divined?
He would not easily mistrust. Perhaps,
There was yet time for those pink dreams of his
To cover evening with their afterglow ;
Perhaps they were not utterly a child's
Unreasoned hope ; perhaps, for hearts grown wise,
There was a second sweet, diminished glory
Not utterly unlike the first. She watched
The moon rise like a luminous, veiled face
Out of the heavy cloudbank, wondering
Whether he too were watching it somewhere
And feeling in his breast this same dull pain
Of protest against loveliness. Ah, yes !
There was a bond as firm as rapture shared,
And that was common misery. Perhaps,

THE GREAT MAZE

Out of the wreckage, he and she might yet
Hammer and patch together some frail raft
To carry them, if winds were favoring,
To some shore not too desolate. Perhaps —
A step upon the threshold. Then a voice:
“Where are you, Clytæmnestra?”

She cried out.

It seemed to her that round about her there
The pillars of the world shook, swayed and fell.
It was Ægisthus!

“Clytæmnestra?”

“Yes?

What do you want, what do you want of me?
Do not come near me! Do you hear? I say,
Stay where you are! What do you want?”

“He knows.”

She drew her breath in with a ghastly sound
Like a death-rattle. Agamemnon knew.
This was the end of pink dreams. What remained
Was of another color not so fair.
She heard Ægisthus panting noisily.
The man was frightened. What a joke, a joke,
That she, a queen, she, Clytæmnestra, she
With all her splendor, beauty, vision, power,

THE GREAT MAZE

She should be subject to a coward, whose hand
Even though it trembled could shake down a world!
So to be mastered by one's own creation!

She looked at him. The lamp had long gone out.
But from the southern heaven the clouded moon
Glowed through thick veils, and showed her lover's
face.

Her lover! Ah, the mockery! Her lover
Was out there somewhere in the dark, alone,
Tearing the memories like teeth diseased
Savagely from their lodgment, root and blood,
Not this man, ah, not this man.

With quick steps
He crossed the room. She shrank from him. His
face

Was wan and nervous, every muscle strained,
The eyes delirious, the lower lids
Purple and quivering like summer dusks
With ceaseless, far heat-lightning. The gay grace,
The lordliness, the fine Apollo-air,
The self-regard, the swaggering contempt,
The pride, the fire — there was no trace of these.
Here there was only fear and turbulent haste

THE GREAT MAZE

Without direction, passion without will,
Madness without the courage of the mad.
And Clytæmnestra looked at him, and laughed.

He clutched her arm. "Why do you laugh like
that?

I saw him. And I saw his eyes. He said
We should have murdered him this afternoon.
I thought you would stop soon."

"Did he say that?"

The laughter ceased indeed. "If he said that,
Why am I still alive?"

He bit his lip
To fight the terror down, and tossed his head
With something of the old, contemptuous scorn,
Kindling his cattish eyes. "I told him tales,
Told him a pretty story of your woes,
And told it with such eloquence, I swear,
I half believed myself you were the clean
And estimable pattern of wronged wives
That I depicted. Oh, it was well done.
Some day I'll write it down, if to my wit
Be added length of days which, thanks to you,
Seems dubious just now." His voice was hard,

THE GREAT MAZE

And there were knives in every note of it.
But Clytæmnestra smiled, not scornfully,
But as a titan, armed to fight the gods,
Might smile at pygmies, busy with their swords
About his ankles, while upon the hills
He sat and waited for the gods to come.
A sudden calm was on her like the calm
Of glacial ice. The light fell on her face,
And made it look like marble breathed upon
By some unearthly goddess of disdain,
So white, so calm, it seemed a sledge might shatter
The chiselled head and on the fragments yet
That look of cold, indomitable calm
Remain to startle men. Ægisthus watched
The grandeur grow upon her; where he stood,
A shadow amid shadows, pantingly
Striving to scoff the quiver from his knees,
He watched that woman of the aimless years,
This woman he had patted, patronized,
Sneered at and kissed and made a mistress of,
Grow into something huge, colossally
Removed from him who once had been so sure
He was the titan, she the little fool.
“What are you waiting for?” His voice was coarse.

THE GREAT MAZE

All the old music, all the arrogant,
Persuasive eloquence was gone from it.

"Where is your cloak?"

"My cloak?"

"For flight."

"For flight?"

She laughed a distant and sardonic laugh.

"With you?"

"Of course with me. I have a boat
Below the garden. Quick. Where is your cloak?"

"I have forgotten."

"I will keep you warm!"

"Whither?"

"There is an island —"

"Go to it.

If there is any island in the seas
Worth fleeing to, go, find it and be safe.
I stay."

"Don't be a fool. The boat is there.
What do you stay for here but death?"

She smiled.

"What do we stay for anywhere but death?
The question is not where we stay, but how,
Master or slave." Her voice was very calm

THE GREAT MAZE

And very stern. She seemed remote from him —
A mountain holding converse with the sea,
Scarcely a woman waiting in her guilt
For an awakened husband to appear
And end the comedy. She seemed to him
Desirable and inaccessible.

As never through the years, a woman grown
To strange, uplifting godhead by some force
Of stark will and indomitable pride
He had not dreamed was there. Deep in his heart
There was a note that quivered in response
To grandeur always, when the lewd, vain eyes
Forgot their lewdness and their vanity
An instant and let grandeur through; it shook
His body as a song will shake a house.
He seized the limp hand hanging at her side,
And crushed it to his lips and, holding it,
Moaned, as the longing quivered suddenly
Beneath the fear, like new life in a corpse,
Lighting a thousand fires that blew toward her.
His eyes were hot and hers were like two coals,
But not for him. Their heat was not love's heat.
He tried to draw her to his breast; in vain.
She leaned from him and with an iron arm

THE GREAT MAZE

Held him apart from her. He cried her name.
She laughed as steel laughs in a battle. "Go!
He will be after you, Ægisthus. Go!"

He flung her arm aside and for a flash
Held her against his heart. "Not without you!"
She struggled free. "I stay, I tell you!"

Again

He caught her in his arms. She did not struggle.
She did not have to struggle. She was ice.
He felt his kisses freeze upon her lips,
And one by one the fires within go out
Before the frigid wind that blew from her.
He let her sink upon her couch, and strode
Heavily toward the window, breathing in
The fresh and open fragrance of the night
As one emerging from a tomb. She watched
The black form in the moonlight, and it seemed
Vaguely to her strained mind that he was part
Of some long-ended story, living on
Malignly as the background of bad dreams.

He turned to her; with quick, impulsive step
He strode across the moon's white neutral land
From his gloom to her gloom. His pale face flashed

THE GREAT MAZE

An instant startlingly 'twixt dark and dark.
He cried, "I love you, Clytæmnestra! Come!
We have no time to lose. Love me or not,
I have enough love in this being of mine
Forever to suffice us both. Ah, come,
Where I can guard you, care for you, build towers,
Houses and gardens for you, make your days
Beautiful to your ears and to your eyes,
Until you love them, linger over them,
And loving them, at last, love him whose love
Built them upon the waste another made."

His face was close to hers; she felt his breath
Hot on her cheek. Her eyes were wide, and fires
Were burning in their deeps; but save for these
Her face was still white marble, stern and smooth,
A sculptured face with two live coals for eyes.
She spoke as one a thousand miles away.
"You have the undying habit of sweet words.
They do not move me very much, Ægisthus.
That may not be their fault. They are good words
And pleasantly pronounced, and underneath
Runs the sweet brook-song of a poet's blood.
I do not wish to hurt you. I believe

THE GREAT MAZE

That you would worship me at least a week.
Go. Please."

He looked at her with grieved, bleak eyes
From which all ugliness, all vanity
Had by one stroke been swept. It seemed, almost,
A miracle had given him new eyes,
Or he had suddenly burst wide the flat,
Unholy gates, at last revealing there
The true eyes of the true man. At her feet
He sank down, not at all with the old grace,
But like a soldier stricken, and his words
Flowed as blood flows from wounds beyond the will
Of him or anyone to staunch or stay.
"I love you! Look at me. Say what you want
About me, hate me, scorn me, scoff at me,
Despise me, call me all the bitter names
You always called me in your heart of hearts,
Maker of phrases, fool, knave, coward! Oh,
I know your face, I know each line, each cloud
That passes over that smooth brow of yours,
Each shadow, like a wind upon a wave,
Crossing your cheeks, each wonderful, faint smile,
The carriage of your head, your lifted chin,
The falling and the rising of your lids;

THE GREAT MAZE

I know them all, I know the things they say,
I know the bitterness, the love, the hate,
The pity that they utter; day and night
I have knelt here and watched them, while you sat
And let me talk to you, staring to sea,
Dreaming — of Agamemnon. Oh, I know!
I know a thousand things. I know myself.
You told me in the icy intervals
Between your kisses what you thought of me.
And still I loved you. See, I love you now.
Even while I hear the very blood in you
Whispering, 'Agamemnon'; even now,
Even while I see the scorn you have of me
Melt in Olympian pity; worse, ah, worse
Than all the scorn you ever uttered; now,
Even now I love you as I never loved you.
I am not brave or noble. In my veins
Is no desire for battle. I have eyes,
And a mad longing to hold beauty once;
And a weak will, and that is all of it.
But what I have and what I am are yours."

She heard him, and it seemed to her the voice
Was in the next room, to some other ear

THE GREAT MAZE

Pouring the passion, the abasement forth ;
So alien and irrelevant to all
That swept like swollen rivers through her being,
This crouching figure seemed. He raised his head.
"Why, since you hated me, did you pretend
That I was something other than a toy
To pass the years with? Why did you pretend
That I was new life to your body, light
To the gray twilight where your spirit hurried,
Forsaken, toward the night? I gave you all,
But you who gave me what the world calls all
Gave me the hollowest of love's black lies
To feed my heart upon. Why?"

She arose ;
With one hand raised as though to shield her eyes
From his accusing passion, she rose up.
He clutched her garment. "Tell me. Tell me this.
Was I a tool, was I an instrument,
Only an instrument of your despair,
Wreaking its vengeance for the wasted years?
Answer me, Clytæmnestra."

Gravely then
She gazed into his haggard face. The moon
Shone on her eyes. He read her answer there,

THE GREAT MAZE

And sank back with a strident, bitter laugh
That died out in a helpless moan, itself
Dying in a low, whispered, "Be it so.
But come!"

She turned. "Go. He will be here soon.
I never loved you. You are nothing to me.
You were the drug to make my sick brain cease
Ravelling and unravelling forever
A golden yarn. You were the knife I chose
To cut the living canker from my heart.
You failed, you failed. You left the canker there.
You were not even a good tool, Ægisthus."
Her voice was hard and cold. She crossed the room,
And as she went it seemed to him the air
Was like a sea, and she was like a ship
Leaving a wake of audible disdain
To mark her passage. At the window-ledge
She turned. Against the moon her head loomed
huge
In its portentous blackness, and her voice
Was as a statue's would be, could it speak.
"The things that I created to my hand
Shall not have power to drag me down, to drive
My free, uncaptured soul to that gray hell

THE GREAT MAZE

Where basely the acknowledged guilty walk,
Condemned, forgiven, mocked, distrusted, scorned.
Not fear or love or you or Agamemnon
Shall have the power to crush me or deride,
Condemn me or forgive. I will not bow;
I will not be raised up; I will not drink
Mercy from any lips. My days are mine,
And I will keep the government of them.
Stay if you will, go if you will. I stay.
I am the Queen. I am not moved. I move."

A slow wave broke against the shadowy shore,
And hissing died. It seemed to them the last
The dark sea-deeps were ever to fling forth,
So long the silence seemed that followed it.
They waited for the next wave as for day,
Rigidly staring. Solemnly it broke.
Ægisthus cried, "Take me for what I am.
You are my captain now and forever. Use me.
I stay!"

With wide eyes, Clytæmnestra stared
At the white, moon-bathed figure, at her feet
Crouching with upturned face, and hands to her
Outstretched. She felt an icy tremor run

THE GREAT MAZE

Along her veins and make her flesh congeal.
It seemed to her, her body was all ice ;
And every breath of warm, sweet summer air
That came in through the window with its freight
Of odors and its faraway, faint tang,
Was winter-wind, malignant, searching, sharp.
She let the curtain down.

And now the sea,
The blurred stars and the garden and the wind,
The sea-song and the endless cricket-song,
All the old, patient voices, all the old,
Unalienable friends, all were shut out.
The room was deadly dark. Ægisthus heard
Her tentative, faint footsteps passing by,
The rustle of her robe, her broken breathing.
The room seemed full of green, unearthly glows,
Dropping from somewhere slowly past his eyes.
He struggled to his feet. He spoke her name.
She did not answer, and so heavily
The darkness of this too familiar room
Sank with its awful silence on his being,
He dared not speak again.

He heard her step,
Again he heard her garments' murmuring.

THE GREAT MAZE

He stumbled backwards; endless distances,
It seemed to him, he stumbled through black night,
Upsetting chairs and tables, scattering
Her powder-boxes and her golden combs,
Her rings and bands and crowns and necklaces
And mirrors and bright bowls. The cold, smooth
wall

Stopped him at last. He clutched it, faint with
fright.

It seemed to him he saw doom drawing near
Through the enormous blackness, doom in robes
That whispered in the dark, like little snakes,
Terrible things if one could understand.

He saw, or thought he saw, two eyes, like coals,
And then the face an instant, fading out

In a succession of green glows that fell
Slowly to earth. He screamed. For suddenly

Upon his arms, now piteously outstretched,
He felt the cold intrusion of a sword.

He gasped, he moaned, he shrank against the
marble

To let the cold thing fall; and moaned again
At hands unpitying that held it there,
And lips he once had kissed that uttered words

THE GREAT MAZE

That were themselves swords striking in the dark
Murderous blows at his bare, shivering soul.

Shoulder to shoulder, scarcely breathing, cold
With an unearthly coldness, those two, merged
In one will, which was Clytæmnestra's, one
Enveloping resolve to scale the heavens
And beat the gates of high Olympus in
And fall immeasurably and be lost,
But to the end to keep the mastery
Of her own fate and never to bow down ;
Those two, made one, waited for sounds like steps
Along the corridor, while through the gloom
The minutes crawled like felt but unseen ghosts,
A long procession with averted eyes.
And now the wind rose and began to shake
The window's heavy curtain and to cry,
And louder now and more insistently
The waves began to strike against the shore.
An hour they waited and another hour
And then another hour ; and now the wind
Invaded the black chamber, seeking them,
And cutting them with knives and freezing them,
And stirring horribly mute things to speech.

THE GREAT MAZE

A dozen times they heard or thought they heard
Steps in the corridor ; a dozen times
Ægisthus felt the ice upon his arm
And trembled, hearing Clytæmnestra's, "Now!"
And then, before they knew that he was near
They heard the hangings rustle down, and knew
One room enclosed the three of them at last.

They heard him breathing deeply, in and out,
And then they heard him knock against a chair,
Fallen on its side, and heard him set it up,
And heard him crush a golden powder-box
Beneath his foot and feel around for it,
Murmuring something; and then heard him
grobe

On toward her bed again, beneath his steps
Crunching her ivory and golden bands,
And crying, "Clytæmnestra, are you there?
Are you awake? What has he done to you?"
They heard him sink beside the bed, they heard
His hands grope over it to find her face,
They heard him struggle to his feet, they heard
His choked cry, "Are you dead?"

Ægisthus twitched,

THE GREAT MAZE

But Clytæmnestra held his arm. "Not yet,"
She whispered.

Sudden silence fell. No sound
Stirred the black death that filled the room. The
wind,

Even the wind seemed to be listening,
Afraid to breathe. Then Agamemnon spoke.
"Where are you? You are somewhere in the room.
I heard you stirring somewhere. Speak."

Again

Ægisthus quivered, but again the hand
Held him with icy clutch, and at his ear
Again the dark moaned, "No, not yet."

They heard

A table thrust impulsively aside.

A Tyrian vase crashed down. "Oh, woman,
woman!

Where are you hiding from me? Oh, come forth!

I have not come to hurt you. Speak to me.

You are not far. I think I hear your heart,

You are so near. But it is dark. I broke

A vase of yours. I break so many things.

Forgive. You shall have other vases. Ah!

I heard the rustling of your garment then.

THE GREAT MAZE

Where are you hiding, Clytæmnestra? Speak.
I have not come to blame you. I who love you,
And did you grievous wrong, how should I blame
you?

Life is a great maze, Clytæmnestra. You
And I were lost in it awhile. But look,
Love is the thread of it, love is the key.
We shall not walk in mazes any more.
Speak to me! Come to me!"

"Agamemnon!"

She staggered toward him with wide arms.

A hand

Thrust her aside, a thin and icy hand
Thrust her among her tables and her chairs,
Her combs and broken vases, thrust her back,
And gave the breast of Agamemnon not
A woman, but a sword.

He cried, he reeled,
He fell, thrashing, he rose, he fell. The sword
Shook itself loose and on the marble floor
Fell clattering. He fought for breath, he choked,
Trying to speak, and then reproachfully
He moaned her name, and then, "Why?" And
again,

THE GREAT MAZE

More faintly, "Why? Why?" On his breath, the
word

Hung, tremulously fading. When it died,
He went with it into the windy night.

From somewhere in the world there came a cry,
Then steps and other cries, Electra's voice
And other voices out of every day,
Steps hurrying!

Across the littered floor
Blindly, toward where he lay and made no sound
In the chill blackness, Clytæmnestra drew
Her bruised and fainting body, reaching out
Quivering fingers, seeking him, and crying,
"Where are you, oh, where are you?" in low tones,
Inhuman as the wind. She lost her way,
And fell amid the shards of Tyrian glass
His hand had scattered there, and raised herself
And struggled on with bleeding body and face,
Groping through the enormous emptiness
To find a fallen king. She found a sword;
And then she found his hand across the sword,
His open eyes, his bleeding breast, his feet.
She moaned, and kissed his feet and kissed his feet.

THE GREAT MAZE

Ægisthus staggered wildly to the window
And tore the curtain down. The moonlight fell
Whitely on Clytæmnestra where she knelt.
He stared, gasping, "Why? — Why? — Why? —"
A child groped blindly through the hangings.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

NOTE

"The Heart of Youth" was written for the dedication of an outdoor theatre at the Hill School, in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and performed for the first time on the evening of June 6, 1915. It was subsequently published in the Outlook, to whose editors acknowledgment is due for permission to publish the play here.

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CHARACTERS

FRA ANGELO.
RABELIN, *his companion*.
THE DUKE.
ARABIS, *his daughter*.
ALTHÆA } *her friends*.
MELISSA }
A PHYSICIAN.
A PAGE.
A MAN ON CRUTCHES.
A MONK.
A BOY.
HANDMAIDENS.
PAGES.
MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

THE MASTER IN CHARGE
OF THE PERFORMANCE.

SEQUENCE OF SCENES

SCENE I. *A forest*.
SCENE II. *A public square*.
SCENE III. *A dark street*.
SCENE IV. *A room in the palace*.



THE HEART OF YOUTH

PROLOGUE

(The MASTER IN CHARGE, without hat, coat or waistcoat and with the sleeves of his shirt rolled up, appears at back of stage. He is evidently very hot and somewhat exhausted and out of temper. Even before he appears he may be heard calling impatiently to two boys who are quarrelling unseen, but distinctly audible, in the gulley behind the stage.)

THE MASTER IN CHARGE

Come, come now! Stop your jabber. Stop, stop,
STOP!

D'ye think those pretty girls and their mammas
Have come to listen to you, jabbering
Behind the wings? Louis, if you don't quit
Rough-housing Bill this very minute, I'll —
What difference if Bill did steal your towel?

THE HEART OF YOUTH

Steal George's, Gerald's, anybody's. Oh!
If you were only now professionals
I'd have the fun at least of firing you!
But amateurs! Never again, I swear!
If there is anything inside this shirt
Able to profit by experience,
I wash my hands of amateurs henceforth.
Come, play the game. Do, for the love of Mike.
Pretend it's football — anything but Art,
And take a brace, so we can start the show.
Come, now, and stop your nonsense. Up this way.
*(To the audience, as he comes forward mopping his
brow.)*

They're amateurs. And, worse than that, they're
boys.

God knows if there'll be any play to watch.

*(A number of BOYS appear at the back and hesi-
tatingly come forward, one by one, as the MASTER
IN CHARGE introduces them.)*

Well, here they come, prepared to make their bow.
Bow, William. This is William. He's to play
The saint, the wandering good man. This is
George.

(In a whisper.)

PROLOGUE

Stand up, for heaven's sake, and be a man.
He plays the hero-villain, Rabelin.
You've heard it said, Art is economy.
Well, we've economized. Like life itself
We've thrown our good and evil in one pot
And saved one acting rôle, creating thus
A Rabelin too virtuous to hang,
Too wicked to exalt in other ways,
Who knows? — perhaps a man like me — or George.
Watch him! His fault is that he tries to heal
Ere he himself is healed. You know the kind.
Perhaps you've met him — in the looking-glass.
Run along, George. Come, Wolcott. This young
man
Is our Physician. He looks wise, and talks.
Herbert's our Cripple, Sheldon is our Page,
Whose vice is that he sleeps when he should watch,
A thing some folk are prone to. Here's Cornelius —
Althæa in the play. Melissa here
Goes down to glory with the name of Horace.
Bow, Louis. He's our Duke, straight from Illyria —
Stern parent of a sixteen-year-old girl,
Spite of his obviously tender years.
And here is Gerald, the fair maid herself,

THE HEART OF YOUTH

As muscular a Princess, take my word,
As ever bloomed in gardens. Ah, but wait !
We'll have her dying soon, and pale as death ;
And Rabelin with horror in his eyes,
Crying, "Relent ! Oh, punish me no more —"
But that's our story.

*(The Boys have one by one edged over to the right
and disappeared.)*

Well, you've seen our players,
And laughed at them a bit ; and that was right.
For they were only boys in paint and wig,
Meant to be laughed at, boys like other boys,
Your boys and mine. But once the play begins
Forego the laughter. They are ours no more.
The little while you sit upon this slope
And watch our story like deep waters flow
Before your eyes, now calm, now full of storm,
They are not of this world. A little while
They put their souls to sleep, and lend to ghosts
From other worlds the bodies that are theirs.
They do not act, they *are* the Saint, the Duke,
The hero-villain, the fair, fragile maid,
Real for the moment of our pageantry
As love and faith and God's hand in the dark —

PROLOGUE

Spirits made flesh, not boys, but visions! Ah!
Not boys, but dreams; not words, but Truth; not
man,

But something mightier, commanding man,
Alone can fitly dedicate this stage,
This church — where not in unctuous brocade
Prinked and emblazoned for the sight of heaven,
But nakedly in combat, stripped of sham,
Man talks with God. Let spirits dedicate
What is the spirit's! In the name of Truth!

(With an emphatic gesture.)

Now let the curtain rise!

*(He turns as though to leave the stage, hesitates and
turns again to the audience.)*

You smile. The curtain? Let the curtain rise?
Who speaks of curtains in this open dell
Of cool, green turf and unperturbed waters?
What curtain is there here to rise or fall?
Ah, there are hundreds! On *your* eyes they lie —
The curtains which the busy weaving men,
We call the years, have woven of your thoughts.
You said that thoughts were nothing. What a web
Have now the weavers made of that thin silk
The spider-brain spun of the love of things

THE HEART OF YOUTH

The eye could see, the ear could hear, the hand
Could finger, squeeze and claw. Ah, what a web
Of gray, inconsequential-seeming threads!
The modish thoughts, the meat-and-money
thoughts —

In webs, in webs, in iron curtains, proof
Against whatever fires of poesy
Burn in white aspirations from our lines,
They hang between us and your inner eyes,
Those better eyes, the pure eyes of the soul.

Lift up the curtain! For an hour lift up
The veil that holds you prisoners in this world
Of coins and wires and motor-horns, this world
Of figures and of men who trust in facts,
This pitiable, hypocritic world
Where men with blinkered eyes and hobbled feet
Grove down a narrow gorge and call it life.
Lift up the curtain! Gaze upon *our* world.
Look! Are there cedars here, a fence beyond,
A pond, a football field, an ugly mass
Of huddled roofs behind that poplar-row?
Lift up the curtain! We are in a wood
Above a city in Illyria.

PROLOGUE

The time is twilight. From the hills, the Saint
Comes with his young disciple; in the town
The people wait. Hush! You can hear the bell
Calling their hope across the golden eve.
The dusk is full of peace. You would not dream
That in the town a Princess perishes
For love of God, and on these hills, a boy
Struts gaily toward disaster. Look, what heights?
What deeps, break on your eyes, what heavens, what
hells
In the small orbit of the heart of youth?
Lift up the curtain! Let the play begin.

SCENE I

A FOREST

(From the right enter FRA ANGELO, a tall friar in a white cowl. He is accompanied by RABELIN, a boy of seventeen in mediæval garb.)

FRA ANGELO

Look, Rabelin. Our journey nears its end.
There lies the city, slumbering in the dusk.
So beautiful it is, so calm, so mute,
So open to God's gaze, you would not guess
How the bees hum and labor in the hive
And love and kill and die. So many roofs,
And under each the struggle and the pain;
Youth reaching out, and old age falling back;
Youth, hoping; age, remembering; each at strife
With earth and heaven, scarce knowing why he
strives.

So many roofs, so many tragedies

SCENE I

Of unfulfilled existences.

The sun

Plays with gay magic on the fretted dome.

Look, with what reckless generosity

He strews his gems. That flash was from a pan

In some poor drudge's hand; that running light

Broke from a sudden ripple on the stream,

Raised by the first puff of the evening breeze.

How soft the night falls on those far, dark hills.

Like an inaudible, blue wave it breaks

Along the horizon's edge. The valley mists

Rise up like foam. Wait. Soon upon the deep

The white sails shall appear, the silver sails

That carry cargoes through sidereal seas

For the immortal venturers of heaven.

I shall be glad to see the stars again.

RABELIN

You are a strange man when the stars come out.

I know you while the sun shines. Now and then

I almost dare to laugh at you as though

You were a human being like myself.

But when the stars come out, you make me think

Of mountains and enormous ghosts that tower

THE HEART OF YOUTH

To heaven and make me shiver and feel small.
I don't much like to think of things like that.

FRA ANGELO

Are you afraid of me?

RABELIN

Not now. You have
A dear and human way with you by day,
A way of being near. I never thought
A good man could be such a friend. I'm sure
You're pleasanter than ordinary saints.
And yet, at twilight, when the stars come out,
You frighten me. You seem so far away.

FRA ANGELO

The stars are friends of mine.

RABELIN

Yes, that's the joke.
You're human, but you have such queer ideas.
If you were only now like other men,
Why, with your reputation as a saint,
Your holiness, and that odd gift of yours
Of making sick men well and bad men good —
Heaven knows what eminence you might attain.

SCENE I

You ought to be the Pope, you might be King;
If you would do as much as lift your hand,
You could be richer than a duke, with gold
And jewelry and robes of scarlet silk — —.

FRA ANGELO

Gold must have guardians, jewels must have locks,
Clothes must have roofs to shield them from the
weather.

Such things are nothing if they are not all.
It is a matter of the eyes; and mine
See heaven's gold and have no taste for earth's.

RABELIN

You are a holy man and I am not.
There lies the trouble. You don't care a rap
For gems and gold and scarlet things to wear.
I do, like every gentleman of taste.
I think I must have noble blood somewhere,
For I have feelings for life's higher things
That as a rule only a noble has,
Fine linen and such things. You wear a cowl
And under that a rope and that is all.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

You think that's saintly. Well, I think it's just
A little narrow, I might almost say
A little cowardly, as though you feared
That your religion might not stand the strain
Of silk on Sundays.

FRA ANGELO

Something might be said
About the cowardice that hides in cowl.
But I prefer a cowl.

RABELIN

That's your affair.
I'll not dispute you have a free man's right
To your own kind of clothes. But I assert
You have no right to keep from me the means
To clothe myself in silks if I so wish.

FRA ANGELO

What have I done?

RABELIN

What have you done? Last night
You healed a rich man's son, you raised him up
When he was gone almost, and when they brought

SCENE I

Gold to repay you, you rejected it!
That was your business, that was your affair
If you refused the wherewithal to give
Drink to the orphan, to the widow meat.
Oh, I'll admit that was your own affair,
Though I've my notions of its saintliness! —
But when they turned and offered me their gold,
Saying, "Your friend is young, he wears no cowl,
Some day perhaps he may have need of gold,"
And you refused to let me take their gift,
That, I declare, was holiness gone mad.

FRA ANGELO

A week ago your thoughts were all of heaven.
Why are they turned so suddenly to earth?

RABELIN

Oh, I am sick of this religious buncome.
I think and think and don't get anywhere.
Things you can see, things you can touch and smell,
Those are the things I seem to want — real things,
Substantial things that you can weigh. God knows
If there is any God. I'm sure I don't.
But there is money and there's power and place —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

FRA ANGELO

If you wish money there are many ways
That money may be sought. Why do you, then,
Follow a wandering madman through the hills?

RABELIN

Heaven knows.

FRA ANGELO

I never urged you, Rabelin.
You came to me. I did not ask you whence,
Nor why you came.

RABELIN

I came from dice and taverns.

FRA ANGELO

So wicked and so young!

RABELIN

Oh, laugh! You think
I'm just a boy. You never would believe
How bad I was.

FRA ANGELO

(*Warmly.*)

No.

SCENE I

RABELIN

Well, then, don't blame me
When you discover what a devil I am.
Sometimes I fear I'll be an atheist.

FRA ANGELO

But you were such a fire of faith.

RABELIN

I know.

I swallowed everything, hook, bait and sinker.
Now half of it seems childish, and the rest
Old women's talk, not meant for grown-up men.

FRA ANGELO

Perhaps when you have lived —

RABELIN

But I *have* lived.

You don't quite realize what I've been through.
I've passed through terrible temptations. I'm
Not like those other boys who don't know life.
I'm different. I've seen things. Oh, I have.
I wouldn't for the world upset your faith —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

FRA ANGELO

I understand.

RABELIN

But *my* experience
Has taught me that there isn't much worth while
Except success. When you've got that, you've
got it.

It isn't like this moonshine talk of God
You can't clutch anywhere but like an eel
It slips between your fingers. By and by,
When I begin to heal —

FRA ANGELO

To heal?

RABELIN

Why not?

FRA ANGELO

I must be getting old, and my mind weak.
I can't quite seem to follow your swift flights.
Did you say — heal?

RABELIN

Why, yes.

SCENE I

FRA ANGELO

But you're a sceptic!

RABELIN

Of course. But then the sick folk won't know that.
I've watched you heal. It doesn't seem so hard.
Some day I'll learn the trick, and when I do,
You bet, I'll not refuse a rich man's gift.

FRA ANGELO

So? So? A trick?

RABELIN

Well, something like a trick.

FRA ANGELO

Is that the reason why you cleave and cling,
To learn my trick? A trick, a juggler's trick! —
And turn it into goblets and fine linen?

RABELIN

I've made you angry.

FRA ANGELO

Yes, you strike at God
When you strike at His work.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

It's your work.

FRA ANGELO

No.

RABELIN

Well, I suppose you're through with me for good.
I'm sorry and — I swear — I meant no harm.
I've followed you because I cannot help
But follow. There is something in your eyes.
I love you, and I follow. That is all.

FRA ANGELO

Give me your hand. I love *you*, Rabelin.

RABELIN

You were young once. You know the fires that
burn
Inside a fellow. Oh, I can't explain.
I hate myself, and everything, but you,
And somehow, you're the one of all the world
I'm meanest to. I don't know what I want.
I think I want to *do* something, to fight,
Or go to sea, or be a missionary,

SCENE I

Or go about the country, healing folk
Like you. Sometimes I want to die.

FRA ANGELO

Not yet, my brother. God has quite enough
Boys of your age to manage up in heaven,
And earth may find some labor for you yet.

RABELIN

You're making fun of me again!

FRA ANGELO

Of course.

My love were less the deep love that it is
If it were love unmixed with laughter.

RABELIN

(Almost tearful.)

Well,

I won't be laughed at, teased and patronized.
It may be sinful, but I'm not a saint,
And don't pretend to be, and I'm not meek,
Nor humble. Not a bit of it. I'm proud.
Some day or other we are bound to break.
It might as well be now.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

FRA ANGELO

Why, yes. Why, yes.
Freely you came and you shall freely go.
Give me your hand.

*(RABELIN, with his back turned toward him, makes
no move to accept the proffered hand.)*

You won't? Why, then, good by.
I'm very sure that we shall meet again.
(He goes out, centre back.)

RABELIN

(Tossing his head defiantly.)
Oh, for a chance to show what I can do!
Anything! Just to show him. Anything!
If only some one'd fall into a river
While I was near, or there would come a war,
I'd make him swallow humble pie, I would!
(He goes out, whistling desperately.)

SCENE II

A PUBLIC SQUARE IN THE TOWN

(A choir is heard chanting off stage. Enter the PAGE, left.)

PAGE

(Yawning and stretching.)

"Watch and be ready," said His Nibs the Duke.

"Run, Theobald, and fetch the holy man.

He may come soon. He may not come till
night.

Watch and be ready." That's all very well.

I've watched for seven blank and weary hours.

I don't believe there is a holy man.

And even if there is, it's ten to one

He'll somehow circumnavigate this burg.

All the excitements do. I'm going to sleep.

Cathedral steps don't make the softest bed.

But it's a hard stone that'll keep my brain

Working against my will. That holy man!

Pshaw! probably he'll never come at all,

Or if he does — well, I'll wake up in time.

Good night, proud world.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

*(He settles himself comfortably and drops to sleep.
Again the choir may be faintly heard. From the
left, enters a MAN ON CRUTCHES.)*

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

I wonder — will he come?

(From the right, a VOICE is heard calling.)

VOICE

Coming!

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

Oh, where? Which way?

VOICE

Coming!

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

Dear God!

(A BOY runs in from the right.)

BOY

He's here! He's in the town!

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

He's here?

BOY

I saw

Him close as I see you. I saw him heal!

SCENE II

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

Heal!

BOY

Yes. A woman. She was blind. He said —
(The great BELL of the cathedral close by begins to ring with eager, rejoicing strokes.)

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

He's here!

(The PAGE moves restlessly, but settles down again into still sounder slumber. From the left and rear, MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN, among them the halt, the lame and the blind, run in, crying excitedly to each other.)

VOICES

The bell! He's here! He's in the town!
This way! Come, this way!
You're crowding me!
What do I care?
He's coming this way.
I can't breathe!
Heal me!
He's coming! He's coming! He's coming!

THE HEART OF YOUTH

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

Oh, wonderful!

(VOICES, *gaining in volume, are heard at right, then a throng presses in, shouting.*)

NEW VOICES

He's here!

THE OTHERS

He's here! He's here!

(FRA ANGELO *enters. The crowd surges about him with shouts. The Cathedral CHOIR is heard again more loudly and dominantly than before.*)

VOICES

Heal me! Holy man, heal me!

(RABELIN *enters right and stands apart from the crowd, a little supercilious and bored.*)

FRA ANGELO

(*Gently.*)

Peace, peace, good friends.

(*The crowd parts and FRA ANGELO emerges. THE MAN ON CRUTCHES, who has kept in the background, hobbles up to him.*)

SCENE II

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

(Stretching out his hand.)

Heal me!

FRA ANGELO

(Gazing tenderly into his eyes.)

You are healed.

THE MAN ON CRUTCHES

(Stares incredulously, stretches his limbs wonderingly and suddenly lets his crutches fall with a cry.)

Healed!

(The cry is taken up by the others who surge about FRA ANGELO.)

FRA ANGELO

Come. Let us rest our hearts in God's good house,
And speak with one another.

(He goes out left, followed by the hushed and awe-struck crowd. RABELIN, startled out of his defiant mood by the healing of the cripple, stands motionless an instant, pondering.)

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

"You — are — healed."

Um. That seemed easy.

PAGE

(*At left, waking.*)

Is it morning yet?

RABELIN

Hello. What's here?

PAGE

Don't talk to me like that.

RABELIN

Say, who are you?

PAGE

I am the Duke's own page.

Remember that.

RABELIN

Pooh! What's a duke? I've been
A saint's companion, and I could be now,
If I'd been willing to endure his ways.
But he was — fresh, as teachers sometimes are,
And, well, I felt I was too old to stand
That sort of thing even from a holy man.

SCENE II

PAGE

A holy man?

RABELIN

(Offhand.)

Why, yes. They call him that.

Of course, when you go travelling with a man

You do see faults. But then, he's good, he's good.

PAGE

Say, it's a holy man I'm out to find.

When is he coming?

RABELIN

Why, he's come and gone.

PAGE

(Jumping to his feet.)

Gone!

RABELIN

You're a foolish virgin.

PAGE

Where'd he go?

RABELIN

Oh, you can't see him now. He's healing folk.

There's thousands clamoring to see him now.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

You'll have to wait in line. If things go right
He may be free to-morrow at this time.

PAGE

Oh, help a fellow, won't you? I'll be fired
If I come back without him. I sure will.
I've got to see the holy man.

RABELIN

What for?

PAGE

Well, some one wants him.

RABELIN

Who?

PAGE

(Offhand.)

Oh, just the Duke.

RABELIN

(Impressed.)

The Duke?

PAGE

For his sick daughter.

RABELIN

(Fascinated.)

What's her name?

SCENE II

PAGE

The Princess Arabis.

RABELIN

My, what a name!

The Princess Arabis —

PAGE

She's very sick.

RABELIN

She is?

PAGE

And awfully pretty. White and pink
Like a magnolia flower. And fun to talk to.

RABELIN

What did you say her name was?

PAGE

Arabis.

RABELIN

That's a sweet-smelling name.

PAGE

She's *very* ill.

Oh, please persuade the holy man — —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

Oh, no,

He's far too busy, and besides a duke
To him means no more than a beggar. But —
There might be others who could possibly —
What is the ailment? Measles?

PAGE

Worse than that.

RABELIN

Mumps?

PAGE

Oh, far worse.

RABELIN

Then chicken pox?

PAGE

No. Worse.

RABELIN

(Dejected.)

Then I'm afraid the saint had better not
Attempt to tackle it.

PAGE

Oh, he must come!

SCENE II

RABELIN

What is her ailment?

PAGE

No one seems to know.

She's drooping, fading, slowly, like a flower
That's thirsty.

RABELIN

(Softly.)

Arabis!

PAGE

I've heard them say

It's all because she wants to be a nun,
And the old Duke won't let her. That's absurd!
Who'd droop and pine away to be a nun?

RABELIN

(Pondering.)

Of course, a thing like that is easier
To heal than real diseases — mumps or such things.
It's barely possible the holy man
Might be persuaded, at a pinch, to come;
Since it's not mumps, or something serious,
But just —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

PAGE

The Duke said he'd pay well!

RABELIN

He did?

PAGE

Yes. Heaps and heaps of gold.

RABELIN

Oh, wonderful!

PAGE

You bring the holy man and you'll get some.

RABELIN

(Carelessly.)

Oh, that's all right.

PAGE

I'll skip.

RABELIN

(Dreamily.)

Sweet Arabis!

Why, that's a flower's name.

PAGE

You'll make him come?

SCENE II

RABELIN

(Breathlessly.)

Yes.

PAGE

Good for you. I'll go and tell the Duke.

(He runs out right.)

RABELIN

A Duke! A Princess! Princess Arabis!

A pining Princess! Heaps and heaps of gold!

It's like a fairy-story. *(Pause.)* "You — are —
healed."

Why, it looks easy. Why not? Why, perhaps —

I might — I'm rather bright in other ways —

Who knows? Perhaps it's Opportunity

Banging at my front door. It is! It is!

It's the great chance to show what I can do,

To show the holy man —!

(A MONK enters right, hurrying across the stage.

RABELIN impetuously stops him.)

Hold on!

MONK

What's this?

RABELIN

Take off your cowl!

THE HEART OF YOUTH

MONK

My cowl?

RABELIN

Quick!

MONK

Please, sir, but —

RABELIN

I want it.

MONK

So do I.

RABELIN

Quick! Take it off!

MONK

I've only got a hair-shirt underneath!

RABELIN

I don't care. Quick!

(He strips the MONK of his cowl and quickly puts it on over his clothes. The MONK, in his brown hair-shirt, reaching to his knees, hurries out, right, calling, "Help! Robbers!")

Now, which way to the palace of the Duke?

(He looks right and left, then runs out, back.)

SCENE III

A DARK STREET

(*Enter RABELIN, stealthily, rear centre.*)

RABELIN

That's it. That must be it. Where is the gate?
How black and tall and hard and cold and stern
The walls rise up. There's not a tree, just
stones.

Beneath, above, about — a world of stone.
It makes me shiver. I'm not used to towns.
I wonder what the holy man would say
If he could see me now? It's getting dark.
How funny shadows act behind one's back!
They act alive, but not alive with people.
I'm not afraid of flesh and blood and bone,
Robbers and such things, nor of ghosts; but
these

Queer shifting shreds that are not ghosts nor men
Make me all goose-flesh. What was that? Good
Lord!

(*FRA ANGELO enters right.*)

THE HEART OF YOUTH

FRA ANGELO

Is that you, Rabelin?

(RABELIN *cowers, but does not answer.*)

Is that you, brother?

I missed you and a something in my heart

Said that you needed me. And so I came.

RABELIN

(*Softly.*)

I do not need you.

FRA ANGELO

Then my heart was wrong.

RABELIN

Yes. Very probably.

FRA ANGELO

Why do you keep

Your face so hidden? Are there tales inscribed

On the truth-telling tablets of your eyes

You dare not let me read? Why do you hide?

Are you, a man of seventeen years, afraid?

SCENE III

RABELIN

(Turning sharply.)

I'm not afraid!

FRA ANGELO

What errand are you on?

RABELIN

What's that to you?

FRA ANGELO

Nothing — or everything.

RABELIN

Well, nothing then.

FRA ANGELO

There's something in your voice —

RABELIN

What of it?

FRA ANGELO

Rabelin, come back.

RABELIN

I won't.

FRA ANGELO

(Laying his hands on RABELIN's shoulders.)

What devilry is on you? There's a door

THE HEART OF YOUTH

Closed in the shadowy passage of your eyes.
You've slammed a door wherethrough I used to
pass.

You've slammed it in my face. Look up at me.
A wall! a wall! No passage for me now.
What mischief's brewing on the farther side?

RABELIN

What's that to you?

FRA ANGELO

I am your friend.

RABELIN

My friend!

My teacher's what you are and ever *will* be.
Because I came to you and asked to learn,
You've got a notion it's your heaven-sent job
Forever to look after me, to keep
My feet safe in the straight-and-narrow, watch
My very goings-out and comings-in
As though I was a girl at boarding school
And you my old-maid chaperone.

FRA ANGELO

Dear boy!

Look in my eyes. Am I a friend or not?

SCENE III

RABELIN

I tell you, I am sick of being taught
And led about like a tame elephant.
I know some things and now I'm going to live.
Perhaps I'm not the muddle-headed boy
You think I am, perhaps I am a man,
Perhaps I've got it in me to *do* things.
Let go! I've got my opportunity,
And opportunity comes only once!
Others have fought and won — at seventeen.
Why shouldn't I? Let go!

(FRA ANGELO *drops his hands from* RABELIN'S
shoulders.)

Where is the gate?

I'm going to the palace of the Duke!

(*He runs out, left.*)

FRA ANGELO

The Duke! What! Not — to heal?

Youth, youth! Ah, God!

Be merciful to the wild heart of youth.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE IV

A ROOM IN THE DUKE'S PALACE

(*ALTHÆA enters right, tiptoes across stage, and stands at extreme left of stage as though listening at a door. She gives a sob. MELISSA enters, also crossing.*)

ALTHÆA

(*Softly.*)

Has the saint come?

MELISSA

Not yet.

ALTHÆA

I scarcely dare

Go back to her and say he hasn't come.

MELISSA

He's in the town.

ALTHÆA

I know. I heard the bell.

I can't see why he doesn't come — The Duke!

(*The DUKE enters right. The GIRLS curtsey deep.*)

My lord!

SCENE IV

MELISSA

My lord!

DUKE

(Cheerfully.)

What news?

MELISSA

No news, my lord.
She sobs and laughs and speaks of foolish things.

ALTHÆA

Oh, yield, my lord, before it is too late.
It is no sin to want to be a nun
And vow oneself to heaven.

DUKE

You too are young.
You do not understand such things. A child
Has whims like this that fade out and are gone.
I am not wholly selfish. I desire
To shield her from herself, to be her watchman
Against the intrusive enemies of youth.

ALTHÆA

It's not a whim, my lord. It is a call.
I know it is a call. To see her face
Is to be sure it is a call from God.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

Spare me these arguments. Call the physician.

ALTHÆA

My lord, she's dying!

DUKE

Tush! Comfort yourself.

Girls do not die as patly as they faint,
When lovers or recalcitrant papas
Demand rebuke. My girl shall have the saint
She's crying for, to bring the red cheeks back.
She shall not have her convent. That is final.
Call the physician.

ALTHÆA

(Drawing back.)

Very good, my lord.

(Sobbing, she goes out left, followed by MELISSA.)

DUKE

Absurd, ingenuous, earnest heart of youth!
(Enter the PHYSICIAN, left.)

PHYSICIAN

My lord!

SCENE IV

DUKE

(Lightly.)

Well how's our young besieger?

PHYSICIAN

Sire?

DUKE

What spectres is she threatening me with now?

What bugaboos to force a stubborn parent?

PHYSICIAN

No bugaboos, my lord.

DUKE

You are too serious.

PHYSICIAN

It seems the hour demands it.

DUKE

Come, come. Laugh.

You must not trust her earnestness too much.

It is a children's ailment.

PHYSICIAN

Sire, I fear —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

Don't be so serious, man.

PHYSICIAN

Ah, God in heaven,

She's dying!

DUKE

What?

PHYSICIAN

I can do nothing more.

DUKE

What did you say?

PHYSICIAN

She's flickering, like a lamp,

Burnt out.

DUKE

You're a physician, and you say

This dying is no empty threat of hers?

She's —

PHYSICIAN

She is dying.

SCENE IV

DUKE

Why! I must be mad.
This is against all reason! Men might die
For faith, conviction, men! But not young girls
Of sixteen years. You are absurd!

PHYSICIAN

My lord,

I would I were.

DUKE

I do not understand —
You say—why, it's absurd! Youth may be strange
And from its dewy inexperience weave
Amazing webs of whim; but even youth
Would balk at perpetrating such a travesty
Of reason and of life. You are all wrong;
Or else in league with her to break my will.
Which is it?

PHYSICIAN

Sire, I say what I have seen.

DUKE

I do not understand the heart of youth.
If she had been the praying kind, a prig,
Worried about salvation, bigoted,

THE HEART OF YOUTH

Mawkish, anæmic, anything except
The hearty, wholesome tomboy that she was,
Why, I might understand. A year ago,
One dusk, she saw a beautiful young nun.
That's all the stimulus there is. That's all.
But something opens in her, something shuts,
And suddenly the devil-boy is gone,
And she is all dreams, and deep-sparkling eyes,
Dreams, a long quarter-year; then, overnight,
A blaze of faith. I said, she is a child;
And laughed. She did not laugh. And I laughed
more

To see the grief she did not try to hide
That I should sin against the Holy Ghost
By ridiculing what to her was holy.
I said, this fever will be over soon.
And now you say she's — dying?

PHYSICIAN

So it seems.

DUKE

I did not know that children of her age
Could feel so deeply. When they laugh, they laugh
So like the sunlight, so like running water,

SCENE IV

So without any backward look toward pain,
I did not know that when they wept, their woe
Could tap the same cold, deep, eternal springs
That feed our older grief. I did not dream
Her spirit might be stronger than her flesh
And frown the body's youthful ardor down.
I grope in darkness. Youth bewilders me.
I cannot probe it, plumb it, comprehend
The meanings of the songs and silences
That shake its lovely temples into dust.
Dying, you say?

PHYSICIAN

(With a helpless gesture.)

My lord —

DUKE

Bring her in here,
Where she can see what light the day has left
For a bewildered world.

PHYSICIAN

(Withdrawing.)

I go.

(He crosses to extreme left.)

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

Dear heaven!

What an unmotivated farce is life —

Unless indeed — Where is the holy man?

PHYSICIAN

(Returning.)

They're bringing her, my lord.

DUKE

Good. You may go.

(The PHYSICIAN bows and goes out back.)

The holy man! Is he the answer? Ah!

(Enter left, ALTHÆA, MELISSA, and FOUR other GIRLS, attendants on the PRINCESS ARABIS, bearing a cot on which ARABIS is lying. They set the cot down at left centre, forward, and group themselves about it.)

ARABIS

(Faintly.)

It must be very late.

DUKE

The sun has set.

ARABIS

You promised that the holy man would come.

SCENE IV

DUKE

I sent for him. He was delayed, perhaps,
And will still come.

ARABIS

I fear he will not come.

DUKE

I sent a page to meet him.

ARABIS

Oh, I fear

The messenger forgot, or else the word
He bore from you lacked warmth. If the saint
knew

How much I want him he would come, I know.

There is so much I want to ask of him.

I think that I could live, if I saw him,

And he could tell me how to make my way

Through this most difficult thicket. Why, it
seemed

As though all weakness faded like the dark

At your mere word that he might come. The sun

Was high then. That was long ago. And now

The night comes on, and he has not yet come.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

I'm hot and very tired.

You see, if Christ
Called, and I did not come, and up in heaven
My mother heard him call, and stood by him
Waiting for me to answer all night long —

ALTHÆA

She's wandering again.

ARABIS

(Dreamily.)

What did you say?

ALTHÆA

Sleep, sleep, my Arabis.

ARABIS

I can't. You know
Mother is weeping, for she hasn't heard
The sound of all sweet sounds she wants to hear.
And Christ is saying, "Never mind, don't cry,
She'll answer soon." But mother's half afraid
I never will —

DUKE

Oh, child, you break my heart!

SCENE IV

ARABIS

I try to call and try to call, and can't.

(The PAGE enters.)

PAGE

My lord!

DUKE

He's here?

PAGE

He's in the town, my lord.

DUKE

Not here?

ALTHÆA

Not here?

ARABIS

(Faintly.)

Not here?

PAGE

He's on his way.

I dare say, any minute he'll be here.

ARABIS

What did he say? —

ALTHÆA

He's coming, Arabis!

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

(*To PAGE.*)

Bring him up quickly when he comes.

(*Exit PAGE.*)

ALTHÆA

The saint —

The holy man — he's coming.

ARABIS

(*With a long, glad sigh.*)

Oh!

MELISSA

Listen!

ALTHÆA

He'll just say, *Rise!* And you'll get on your feet.

MELISSA

Listen! It won't be long before you'll hear
His footsteps now.

ALTHÆA

Listen! Was that a step?

MELISSA

First on the stair, then in the corridor —

ALTHÆA

Then at the door —

SCENE IV

MELISSA

And then here in the room !

ARABIS

Yes. And he'll cry, *Arise !*

DUKE

(*Aside.*)

Oh, heart of youth !

MELISSA

And you'll be up on your two feet again.

ARABIS

And strong, you think ?

ALTHÆA

Of course. And with red cheeks.

MELISSA

And all the hair you lost will come again
Just twice as beautiful. It's always so
In story-books.

ARABIS

(*Dreamily.*)

I don't care about hair.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

ALTHÆA

Listen! I heard a knocking at the gate!

ARABIS

I heard it, too!

MELISSA

Listen! They've drawn the bolt!

I heard it grate.

ALTHÆA

There! Did you hear the chain?

DUKE

(Crossing swiftly to back.)

Steps!

MELISSA

On the stair!

ALTHÆA

Louder and louder now!

ARABIS

(Faintly.)

Steps!

MELISSA

Oh, it's he!

SCENE IV

ALTHÆA

The holy man !

ARABIS

Dear mother,

Help me to do my share.

DUKE

(*Softly.*)

Good God, have mercy.

PAGE

(*Reëntering.*)

My lord, the holy man —

DUKE

Let him come in.

ARABIS

At last !

MELISSA

Now in a minute you'll be well.

(*RABELIN, disguised, enters. The PAGE goes out.*

The DUKE, ALTHÆA and MELISSA fall on their knees.)

RABELIN

(*Uncomfortably.*)

Please — please get up.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

(Kissing RABELIN's hand as he rises.)

Father —

RABELIN

(Awed.)

Are you the Duke?

DUKE

I am.

RABELIN

You know, you mustn't kiss my hand.

DUKE

Forgive.

RABELIN

I will.

ALTHÆA

(Softly to MELISSA.)

A curious holy man.

DUKE

Here is my daughter.

RABELIN

(Approaching the cot.)

Oh!

SCENE IV

DUKE

I think my page
Told you our sorrow. Yet you seem surprised.

RABELIN

(Softly.)
She's very beautiful.

DUKE

Without, within.
Her body is no fairer than her soul.

ARABIS

I wish it were so.

RABELIN

(To DUKE.)

Wait outside the door.

(The DUKE retires to the right, ALTHÆA and MELISSA and ATTENDANTS to the left.)

ARABIS

You're very young. I thought all saints were old.

RABELIN

I'm — older — than I look.

ARABIS

I'm glad.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

But years

Don't count in matters of this kind, of course.

It's what we've learned from worry and the knocks

Of hard experience that counts, not years.

You'll understand when you have lived. Of course,

It's easy to be good, before you know

The fun of being wicked —

ARABIS

(Bewildered.)

You are strange.

You say so much that I can't understand.

RABELIN

You're young. When you have lived —

ARABIS

When I have lived,

It won't much matter, will it, what is said

On earth? For I will understand the words

The angels speak to one another in heaven,

And need no lesser understanding.

RABELIN

Still,

Experience —

SCENE IV

ARABIS

Oh, I am sick of words.
My head burns. Why are you so different
From what I dreamed?

RABELIN

How — different?

ARABIS

(Staring.)

He's standing on the crystal wall of heaven
Telling my mother, "Wait. She will speak soon.
Listen. Above the roaring of the world
Can you not hear the voice of Arabis?"
I try to speak and can't. Oh, holy man,
Help me to speak!

RABELIN

She's very sick.

ARABIS

Oh, mother!

Why can't I speak?

RABELIN

(In fear.)

Suppose —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

ARABIS

(Conscious again.)

What did you say?

RABELIN

(Relieved.)

She's clear again!

ARABIS

If I could see your eyes

I might gain strength. I feel so limp and weak.

It's always in the eyes God has his seat.

Perhaps, if I could look into your eyes —

RABELIN

(Turning his head away, softly to himself.)

What have I done?

ARABIS

You will not let me look.

(She begins to weep softly.)

RABELIN

(Kneeling impetuously at her bedside.)

Don't cry. Forgive me. Oh, don't cry! You
wrench

The living heart right out of me. Don't cry.
Look in my eyes.

SCENE IV

ARABIS

I can't see, for these tears.

RABELIN

Oh, please don't cry.

ARABIS

You are so different

From what I hoped and longed for. I was sure
The holy man who healed folk would heal me.
I did not wish to live until I heard
That you were near with healing in your eyes.
I knew how you would guide my strengthened feet.
And when I heard you on the stair, I said,
"One minute more and he will come, and stand
Beside my bed and lift his hands, and cry,
Arise! and I will rise, healed." — Such a dream!

RABELIN

(Urgently.)

Don't be afraid. I — know the way — it's done.
Of course, you shall be healed.

(Faintly, as he draws back.)

Oh, close those eyes!

They burn into my conscience!

THE HEART, OF YOUTH

ARABIS

I believe!

By God's dear grace, I know I can be healed.

Oh, I believe, believe, believe.

RABELIN

(Aside.)

Dear God!

I'll serve you ever after! Give me help!

ARABIS

I know I can be healed.

RABELIN

(Faintly, apprehensively.)

Rise. You are healed!

ARABIS

(With a glad cry.)

Healed!

*(She tries to raise herself, struggles and falls back,
struggles upward again, and again falls back.)*

Give me strength! Oh, give me faith!

RABELIN

(Prayerfully.)

God! God!

SCENE IV

ARABIS

(With a last supreme effort.)

Mother! If you could only hear me, hear —

(She falls back, unconscious.)

RABELIN

(Flinging himself on his knees beside her.)

What is it? Are you tired? Are you asleep?

What is it? Speak! Oh, answer, answer! Speak!

Oh, do not lie so silent and so white!

Your cheek is cold. Your hand is cold and
limp.

Arabis! princess! Princess Arabis!

Oh, beautiful sweet flower, Arabis!

The last tears that she shed are not yet dry

Upon her cheek. Oh, wake! Why do you
sleep

So soundly? Wake.

(He shakes her gently.)

Oh, wake! I beg. Oh, wake!

I see my sin! You've punished me enough,

Sweet Arabis. Forgive. Relent. Relent!

Oh, punish me no more with those closed eyes,

THE HEART OF YOUTH

Those cold, limp hands! She's fainted.

(Calling.)

Some one! Help!

(Enter the DUKE, right.)

DUKE

What is it?

RABELIN

Water! Quick! Some one bring water!

DUKE

(Kneeling beside the bed.)

She's dead!

RABELIN

No, no, not that, not that!

(ALTHÆA and MELISSA enter left. ALTHÆA brings water.)

ALTHÆA

Here's water!

(They bathe ARABIS's face.)

DUKE

What have you done? What evil —

RABELIN

No, no, no!

Nothing! She lives. She's tired. That's all.
She sleeps.

SCENE IV

ALTHÆA

I cannot hear her heart beat.

MELISSA

Is she dead?

RABELIN

No, no! She shall be healed. She shall rise up.

(On his knees in pleading prayer.)

Dear God! Forgive. Forgive. Make her rise up.

I did not mean such wickedness. Ah, God,

I did not mean it. I'll be good! I swear.

Humble and good. Oh, this time, save me, God!

I thought, I really thought that I could heal.

If I deceived, oh, I deceived myself

As well as her. Oh, heal her, God! I'll pray

Until you must relent. Oh, you'll not wreck

Two lives for one impulsive moment. I—

Just did not understand. I was not bad.

Just vain and proud.

DUKE

(At left, motioning the HANDMAIDENS outside.)

Bear her into her chamber.

(The HANDMAIDENS enter.)

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

Not yet.

(At the bedside.)

Sweet Arabis, shake off that slumber.
You are so beautiful, you must be kind.
Surely behind your beautiful white face
Are mercy and relenting. Wake, oh, wake!
I did not mean to wrong you. Oh, be merciful!
Wake! Wake! She does not stir — she's — Oh!
she's — look! —

(Staggering backwards.)

Fra Angelo! Fra Angelo! Fra Angelo!
I need you!

DUKE

(Rigid and cold.)

Bear the princess to her chamber.

RABELIN

(Clutching the DUKE's arm.)

Send for Fra Angelo! Cry through the streets.
Send for the holy man.

DUKE

Why, what are you?

SCENE IV

RABELIN

(Flinging off his cowl.)

I am a sham, a fraud, a murderer!

DUKE

(Retreating in horror.)

Oh, base, base, base!

(The HANDMAIDENS surge indignantly toward RABELIN.)

Let no one touch the man.

There are diseases of the soul in him

Who cheats in God's name. Go! I have no sword
To reach the depths where those diseases root.

Go! Let the earth unclothe and cover you.

I will not stain my sword with sulphur. Go!

*(The DUKE goes out, left, followed by ALTHÆA,
MELISSA and the other HANDMAIDENS, bearing
ARABIS.)*

RABELIN

(Stumbling after them.)

Not all, all base. I swear it. Arabis!

*(He falls down and remains lying in an attitude of
lifeless despair. ALTHÆA appears left.)*

THE HEART OF YOUTH

ALTHÆA

(Calling.)

Physician! Come! Physician! Oh, where is he?

(She crosses to the back and calls.)

Page! Page!

(The PAGE enters back.)

PAGE

Yes, lady?

ALTHÆA

Run. Fetch the physician.

(The PAGE disappears again. ALTHÆA crosses to the left and goes out.)

RABELIN

(Flinging himself over on his back.)

What have I done? *(Pause.)* Oh, God! What have I done?

(The PHYSICIAN enters back and swiftly crosses and disappears left.)

Who's that? He's gone. To her, perhaps. To her.

If only I could wash out of my eyes

SCENE IV

The look she gave me. Oh, the heights and deeps
Of that reproach! It was as though she cried,
"I wanted strength and you had none to give me.
I wanted God, and you had only words."
The sorrow in her eyes. The pain!

(*ALTHÆA reënters, left.*)

ALTHÆA

(*Calling.*)

Lights!

(*Crossing to back.*)

Lights!

RABELIN

(*Clutching ALTHÆA's dress.*)

Has she awaked?

ALTHÆA

(*Startled.*)

Who's there?

RABELIN

Has she awaked?

ALTHÆA

No.

RABELIN

Oh!

ALTHÆA

Poor boy!

(*Exit.*)

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

Oh, God! (*Pause.*) Dear God!

I really thought that I could heal. Forgive.

I did not know that men must heal themselves

Before they dare stretch out their hands to heal

The other sick. I know now. Oh, I know!

(*PAGES appear carrying torches that flare and flame eerily in the gathering dusk. THEY cross the stage and go out left.*)

Forgive! See, I am punished. You have whipped
My spirit, God, my heart, with a barbed whip.

I'll not be proud again, or vain, or stubborn.

I'll serve, I'll learn, I'll labor. You shall know —

(*He rises to his feet with a sudden consciousness of new strength and resolution.*)

God, you shall know you need teach Rabelin

His lesson — only once.

(*He stands upright, victorious. Enter, right, FRA ANGELO.*)

FRA ANGELO

You called. I came.

RABELIN

(*Without turning.*)

I knew that you would come.

SCENE IV

FRA ANGELO

Why, yes, of course.

A friend comes when he's called.

RABELIN

(Deeply stirred.)

A friend?

FRA ANGELO

(Taking RABELIN's two hands in his and looking deep into his eyes.)

A friend.

(RABELIN sinks slowly down at FRA ANGELO's feet. FRA ANGELO lays his hands gently on the boy's head.)

If there are any shades in God's deep love
I do believe His deepest love goes out
To the tormented, irresponsible,
Gay, eager, burning, foolish heart of youth.

(HE drops his hands; RABELIN remains motionless.)

*FRA ANGELO crosses softly to the left and goes out.
In the distance, the CHOIR of the Cathedral may
be heard again chanting. From the left, PAGES,
bearing torches, stumble in, startled.)*

THE HEART OF YOUTH

A PAGE

Who — who was that?

(The PHYSICIAN enters, confused.)

PHYSICIAN

Who was it?

PAGE

I don't know.

(The DUKE enters, followed a moment later by

ALTHÆA and MELISSA and the other ATTENDANTS

all in more or less confusion.)

DUKE

Strange!

PHYSICIAN

Do you know him, sire?

DUKE

I could not tell.

The place was dark.

PHYSICIAN

I stood beside the bed.

He came into the room and looked at me —

SCENE IV

DUKE

My tongue was lamed that tried to challenge him.
His eyes —

ALTHÆA

His eyes!

MELISSA

His wonderful, deep eyes!

PHYSICIAN

(*Awed.*)
Sire, was that — Death?

DUKE

Strange, strange! But no — not Death!

RABELIN

(*With a cry of understanding.*)
The stars are out. That's why he's strange. The
stars!

DUKE

You! You here?

RABELIN

Yes —

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

(To PAGES.)

Seize him. Take him away!
Take him away before I murder him.
Take him away —

ALTHÆA

Look !

MELISSA

Heaven !

DUKE

What's that—white thing?
(*The PAGES who have laid hands on RABELIN retreat with confused exclamations. The DUKE, PHYSICIAN, ALTHÆA, MELISSA, TORCH-BEARERS and HANDMAIDENS stand huddled in an amazed group, in centre stage. Out of the dusk at left appears ARABIS, looking very slender and white, and moves slowly toward RABELIN. HE steps aside startled. The OTHERS cry out and retreat stumblingly before her.*)

SCENE IV

ARABIS

Don't run away from me. I'm not a ghost.

(*The GROUP draws back yet further, in panic.*)

He said, *Awake!* and I awoke. He said,

Arise! and like a new, fresh wind

Life seemed to fill my sails, and I — came forth.

DUKE

God pity me. My child. My poor, dead child!

ARABIS

Don't say such things. I'm really not a ghost.

Touch me. I am alive! I'm strong, I'm well!

PHYSICIAN

It is her ghost.

ALTHÆA

Poor Arabis!

ARABIS

Oh, dear!

Has no one faith enough to think that God

Could raise a sick girl up?

THE HEART OF YOUTH

RABELIN

(Who has been watching her, spell-bound with wonder and growing ecstasy.)

Yes. Yes. Yes.

(He goes toward her with slow, hesitating steps and fixed eyes.)

See. I believe. I knew that you would live.

(Touching his heart.)

In here I knew. When God sent me my friend,
I knew that He forgave, and you would live.

ARABIS

(Tenderly.)

You? Who are you?

RABELIN

I did an evil thing.

ARABIS

Oh, I remember now. And yet — and yet —
You do not look as though your heart were base.
I scarce remember what you did to me.
I only know, in some black desert, hung
Between the stars and earth, you gave me pain.

SCENE IV

But that is past, and worse things I'd forgive,
Because you knew that I was not a ghost.
To think a boy would know more than all these!

RABELIN

(Kneeling before her.)

Oh, lady, let me serve you.

ARABIS

(With childlike eagerness.)

Why, indeed.

I'll tell my father. He must make a place
For you somewhere, so we can talk together
Of many things I dream of and half see,
Things you'll be glad to hear about, I know,
For you have friendly eyes.

*(SHE chatters on, absorbed. The OTHERS draw
nearer as they slowly realize that SHE is actually
alive.)*

A thousand things!

My head's just full of things to talk about.
I want to know what you think about life
And God and convents. Do you know, I think
That one can serve the Lord in other ways
Than in a nunnery.

THE HEART OF YOUTH

DUKE

Child, it is you!

ALTHEA

(Touching ARABIS timidly.)

She's real.

MELISSA

She's living!

ARABIS

Why, of course, of course!

But it is strange to be back in the world.

Where is the holy man?

DUKE

Go. Bring him here.

(The PHYSICIAN goes out left.)

RABELIN

(To DUKE.)

Forgive me.

DUKE

(Giving him his hand.)

Yes. I do forgive you.

SCENE IV

ARABIS
(*Crying sharply.*) Oh!

DUKE
What is it? Speak.

ARABIS
(*Mysteriously.*) He is not in my room.
I felt a gentle wind blow through my heart.
He's gone.

PHYSICIAN
(*Reëntering.*) He is not there.

DUKE
Not in the room?

ARABIS
(*Softly.*) There is no door but this!

RABELIN
Not in the room?

ALTHÆA
Not in the room?

MELISSA
Not in the room?

THE HEART OF YOUTH

PHYSICIAN

He's gone.

DUKE

(*To PHYSICIAN.*)

The windows there are barred. There's no way out
But this, but this, no way but through this room!
If you say, he's not there —

ARABIS

(*Awe-struck.*)

Who — was — he?

DUKE

Yes.

Who — was — he?

RABELIN

Why, my friend, of course! My friend!

(*Grasping a torch.*)

Come! Come! We'll find him!

ARABIS

Take me with you!

DUKE

Lights!

(*THEY surge forth with their torches into the night.*)

SCENE IV

RABELIN

Come! (*More distantly.*) Come!

(*From afar off, but clearly, like a challenge.*)

Come!

(*Numberless torches appear, following RABELIN up the steep incline and out of sight. From a distance the cathedral CHOIR may be heard again, singing first softly, then more and more triumphantly, until the swelling music of the hymn dominates all other sounds, finally drowning out even RABELIN's distant call.*)

Come! Come! Come!

Hymn

Out of pain and black disaster,
Hear our voices, mighty Master!
Fires of hell rise round and sear us,
Lord in love and pity, hear us!
War and torment roar, assailing,
Sick with sorrow, earth is wailing.
Trampled, broken, bleeding, dying,
Lord, for Thee our hearts are crying!

THE HEART OF YOUTH

Lord, in pride we scorned to heed Thee,
Boasting, "God, we do not need Thee!
We, to whom all earth is given,
What have we to ask of Heaven?
Soaring, delving, warring, slaying,
What have we to do with praying?"
Lord, forgive the mad words spoken.
Lord, behold! Our pride is broken.

Lord, with hearts abraded and burning,
See, Thy beaten sons returning!
Blind with smoke and bent with grieving,
Hungry, tattered — but believing!
See, we gather round about Thee,
Failures, failures, Lord, without Thee!
Take us, Lord. These hands, O take them!
Breathe upon our souls and wake them.

Lord, we fell in our defiance.
Look! With Thee we stand as giants!
Lord, we perished, burning, rending,
Lord, with Thee is battle's-ending!
Lord, with Thee, the darkness dwindles,
Lord, with Thee, the daylight kindles.

HYMN

Lord, we faint without Thee. Feed us!

Lord, we fail without Thee. Lead us!

Lead us, Lord!

Lead us, Lord!

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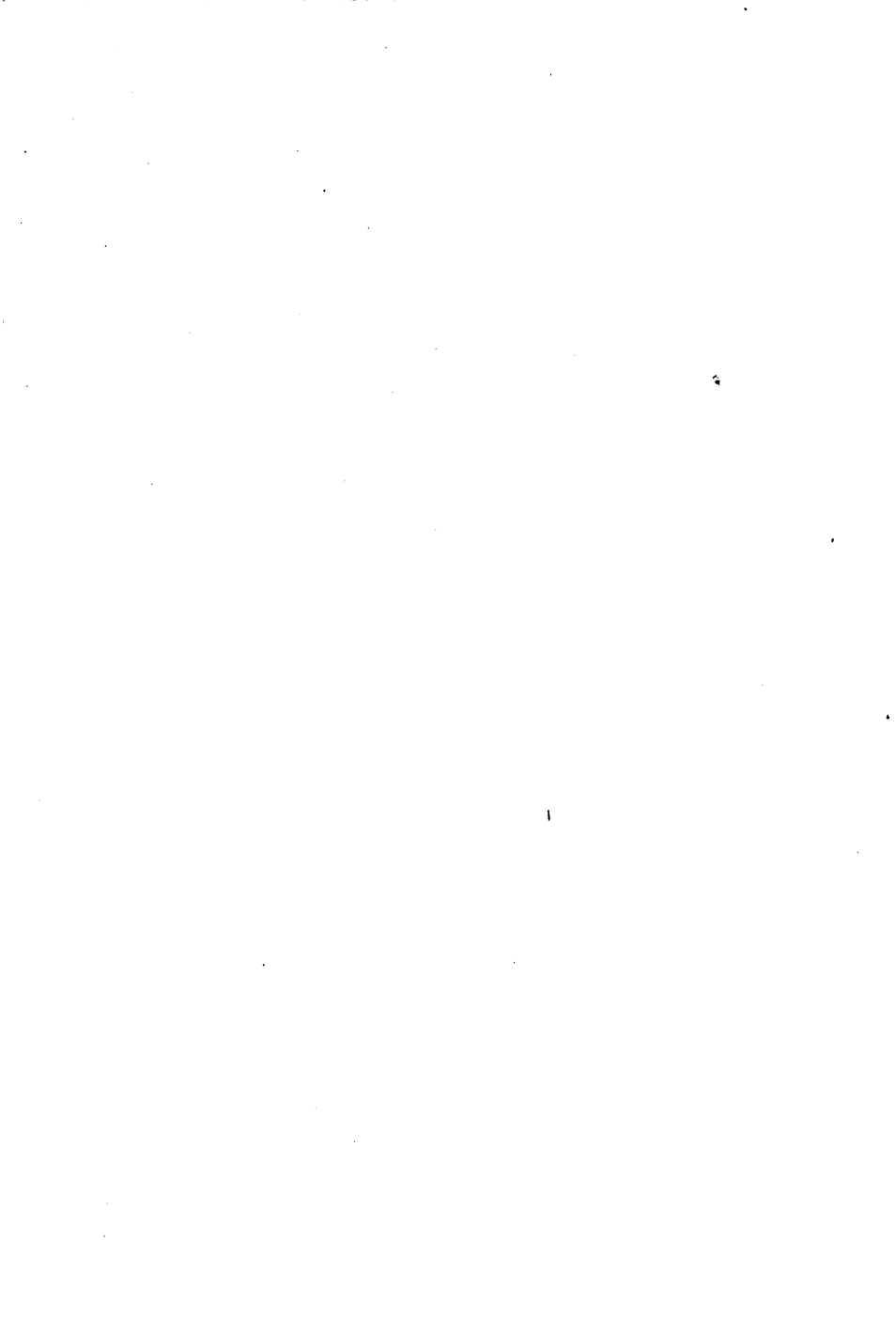
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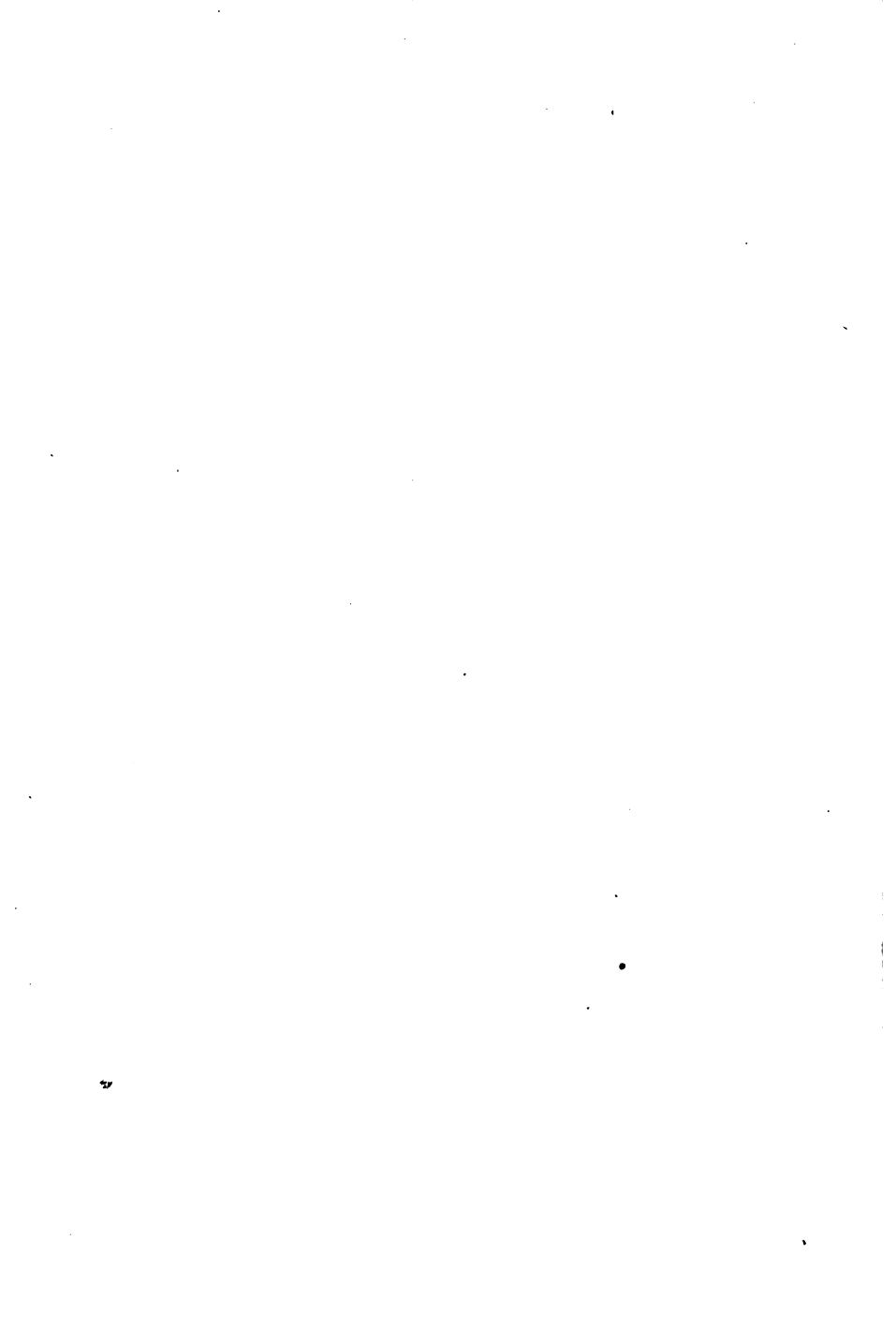
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